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숨김

MAIN CHARACTER HIDES HIS STRENGTH

BOOK 02

Road Warrior

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Main Character Hides His Strength

(주인공이 힘을 숨김)

by

Road Warrior

(로드워리어)

Synopsis

Enemy of the world, cursed by all, Kim Sungchul goes on a quest to prevent the 'prophecy of the end' from coming to pass.

But no matter how much he raised his strength, there were still some things he could not achieve with physical strength alone.

Resolving to obtain the power of magic, he goes into hiding to learn magic from his most hated of enemies, The Mages.

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Chapter 101 – Followers Of Calamity (1)

Animosity against the Enemy of the World was universal, and no one would openly dare refute it. The clergymen attributed all sorts of evil to the Enemy of the world during their sermons and denounced him while wanted posters of him with an astronomical figure as bounty were stuck in prominent places in plazas.

There were efforts in libraries to belittle his achievements. Every one of his heroic acts was erased, and misdeeds were added in fearsome amounts overnight onto his resume. Statues of Sungchul that had been erected in places throughout the Human Empire were torn down and destroyed. Those that weren't already aware of him naturally concluded this man known as the Enemy of the World was a dangerous entity capable of heinous acts through literature and word of mouth.

However, there were a rare few that questioned this oppressive opinion about the Enemy of the World.

“Is what we’re doing really justified?”

Kaal Bomba was watching this man who stood at the peak of Harupaya Ridge creating a divide between the human and devil armies with eyes filled with complicated emotions.

“Regardless of what anyone says, didn’t the Enemy of the World fight alongside us and save us from disaster twice?”

He could still vividly recall the reverberation of the horn flute that swept up from below like a fierce wave carrying a powerful wind along the slope. If Sungchul hadn’t appeared precisely when he did, Kaal and his comrades would have been killed and forgotten. Kaal could understand his comrades that were aiming their siege weapons at the man while pouring out profanities, and yet he was also filled with doubt.

“A dwarven grudge is deeper than the rivers and the seas, but

does this mean our grudge is more important than our gratitude towards our savior? This is my question.”

Unfortunately, the other dwarves did not see things his way.

“I don’t know what he was thinking while saving us, but just look at what’s in that bastard’s hand. He is holding the divine tool gifted to us by our God with his filthy human hands and dirtying it with filthy devil blood. He has committed the gravest of sin against us and made mockery of our people.”

“Rightly so! This is an insult that cannot be overlooked by any dwarf.”

Their hatred toward Sungchul could not be diminished. As long as Sungchul refused to return Fal Garaz... or even if he did, their intention to never forgive his actions was clear. Dwarven stubbornness was often compared to that of stone. Regardless of how much time has passed or how strong of a force tries to bend their will, this hatred would not fade.

Kaal shut his mouth as he knew all too well that his friends would not change their minds so easily. Behind the dwarves who were openly showing hostility, armies big and small were taking up positions on the hill. It was a military unit that was gathered by each nation urgently to respond to the loss at Harupaya Ridge and the appearance of the Enemy of the World.

“...”

Sungchul unemotionally watched as human reinforcements gathered upon the hill where the biting winds blew.

‘Martin Breggas had forfeited his duties, and the Order of the Iron Blood Knights now wave the flag of rebellion. It might have been more odd if the feudal lords hadn’t responded urgently.’

The majority of the reinforcements that had been quickly gathered were mercenaries. Lord of every small nation located behind the Demon Realm battlefield had expended all efforts in

order to form this mercenary company. Sungchul didn't care if the force was composed of mercenaries or standing armies.

He turned his head to look north. The devil army had suffered greatly because of Sungchul and lost a lot of vigor, but the grand devil army that was positioned in the plains still had numbers nearing a hundred thousand. They had their feet tied due to a single person, but as soon as Sungchul left, they were prepared to move south once again.

There was only one reason that the Devil Army was showing such leisure. It was because of the attitude that the humans and its allies had towards Sungchul; the Humans launched sporadic assaults against Sungchul while the Devils watched.

Sungchul's response to this had been passive, but it gave assurance to the Devils. Sungchul was also an enemy of the humans, and that meant he might not side with the humans and simply depart from Harupaya Ridge. They might have lost their commander and a large number of their high-grade Devils, but they weren't willing to give up on this rare opportunity.

“How long are you going to stay here?”

Bertelgia spoke with a heavy sigh as though she was fed up.

“I'm staying until the human army and their allies, gather a powerful enough force to stand against them.”

Sungchul looked toward south through squinted eyes. The numbers were growing with the arrival of large and small mercenary companies, but it was still an insufficient number to stop the demons.

He would probably have to wait a minimum of two more days for the humans to be able to defend themselves. Sungchul briefly reflected on this, leaned on a nearby rock, and closed his eyes.

“So frustrating! You're going to protect those ungrateful idiots that are repaying your help with malice? If it was me, I'd have

been long gone. See what they can do without me!”

“There’s no benefit for me if this place is broken through.”

Sungchul picked up a single pebble and tossed it into the air.

‘Pik! Pik!’

Drops of blood fell from the path the pebble had flown by, and the remains of an eyeball fell to the ground like a deflated balloon. It was an Observer’s Eye sent by a mage of the human faction. It was one summoned with high-grade summoning techniques on a different level than what could be found back at the Summoning Palace, but to Sungchul they were just a plaything to pass the time.

“To get rid of the Seven Heroes quickly, it is advantageous to maintain the current strategic state in many different aspects. If by chance the Seven Heroes arrive onto a land where humans have been exterminated, it’ll make things more complicated.”

“But still, I don’t like it. Especially those dwarves! They’re calling you a son of a bitch! Just cause you stole a hammer!”

“It’s because this hammer isn’t ordinary.”

It had been two days since he held the hilltop. He began to feel peckish. He had filled his belly so far with water and date palm, so Sungchul decided to cook for himself before the watchful eyes of hundred thousand demons.

There wasn’t anything particularly edible in the area; just the colorless, odorless, and tasteless mushroom that he didn’t know the name to was all. Sungchul held a head-sized stone and looked toward the Omen of Calamity soaring through the air. He waited patiently until the Omen was at the nearest point toward him and threw the rock. It flew in a straight line like a beam of light and tore through the Omen’s beak and smashed its skull causing the massive bird to crash toward the ground. Sungchul butchered the fallen Omen of Calamity with a blade and inspected the state of its meat.

“... This is not something anyone should eat.”

It was something he put effort to hunt, but he left it behind without a second thought. Instead, he dug through his Soul Storage and pulled something out. It was noodles fried with oil and dehydrogenated soup. It was something called ‘instant ramen’ back in Sungchul’s world. Strictly speaking, it wasn’t instant ramen. There was no ingredient that hadn’t been carefully prepared by Sungchul’s hands within the homemade instant noodle.

Sungchul took one of the helmets rolling around and used it as a canteen by carefully washing it with water before boiling some water within it. Once the water began to boil, he added a soup base he had sealed inside of a tin container and added noodles that had been fried in oil into the water. All that was left was to watch it boil.

Sungchul didn’t use any additional additives in his ramen. He followed the principle that the true flavor of the ramen would come alive as long as he stuck to the standard ingredients.

“Mmm.”

His stomach which had been filled with nothing but hard palm dates for the past few days began to rumble when he breathed in the aroma of his cooking. Sungchul pulled out some chopsticks and began to stir the ramen boiling in his helmet as he took in the aroma. It was at this moment that he could feel an unfamiliar presence close by. It was an intruder.

“...”

Sungchul glared as his eyes shifted toward the direction where he felt the presence. He couldn’t see anything with his naked eyes, but his Soul Contract – Eye of Truth activated automatically to see the single human figure beyond what his were capable of.

It was an individual who cloaked her body with an

unconventional invisibility magic. It was a young woman draped in a thick robe. Her yellow pupils that held a persistent light resembled one from a reptile. Curiosity rose in Sungchul's eyes.

‘Isn't she that dragon that appeared two days ago on the battlefield?’

The one approaching Sungchul was none other than Kha'nes from the Tower of Recluse.

‘Is he the man known as the Enemy of the World? Quite plain. Not to mention his clothes are pretty much just rags.’

She did not even imagine that Sungchul had already discovered her. She had not hidden herself through ordinary magic, but the highest grade magic of the dragons known as Dragon-tongue. She did not think a mere human would be able to see through her at all.

However, she did not have a chance to witness Sungchul's fight herself. She had been at some nameless lake in Trowyn sprawled onto a sandy beach while Sungchul was massacring the devils. All because she had overexerted herself after being in Dragon form for so long.

She had heard that Sungchul managed to defeat the Devils by himself but to simply accept the rumors of his exploits would be exceedingly unrealistic. Seeing is believing.

It was all for this reason that Kha'nes had decided to discreetly investigate this man known as the Enemy of the World, but a strange aroma tickled the tip of her nose as she took a few steps closer.

‘Huh? I can smell something delicious.’

Sungchul was boiling something on the fire. A red soup was boiling inside a helmet, and she could see some white flour-based noodles dancing within it. It was an aroma that she had never smelled before coming from the food she had never seen before.

“...”

As Kha'nes didn't seem to take any further actions, Sungchul took a mouthful of ramen to his lips.

‘Slurp.’

The chewy noodles steeped in the salty soup was sucked in through Sungchul's lips. It wasn't all that bad to Sungchul's standards. Accompanied by hunger which was the greatest side dish at the top of a mountain with biting wind, it worked his appetite to a degree he had never felt before.

[The Score of this Recipe is... 57 points!]

Even this mysterious person that had judged Korean cuisine so harshly decided to give a relatively decent score for Sungchul's homemade ramen.

‘Of course. It was stock made from the highest grade of chicken fit for serving the emperor and mixed with 32 different spices to make the soup.’

Sungchul continued his meal regardless of whether Kha'nes continued to observe him or not.

“More than 100 thousand men are watching, but I guess food still crawls down your gullet just fine?”

Beltergia mocked him, but Sungchul didn't hear any of it. This ramen that he had prepared after so long was truly an exquisite dish. If there was a single flaw, it was that there was no Kimchi to accompany it. It goes without saying that Kha'nes who was watching incognito was starting to drool.

‘Gulp.’

Her stomach began to rumble as she watched Sungchul eat this strange dish that she had never seen before with such enthusiasm.

‘Now that I think about it, I haven't eaten a proper meal since I took on Dragon form.’

She had eaten two warhorses during her state as a Dragon, but Kha'nes didn't remember this fact. As she was drawn by this strange aroma from this foreign food, she unknowingly took a step closer to Sungchul.

“I know you're there.”

When Kha'nes approached within 10 meters, Sungchul stopped his chopsticks and looked toward her to let out a sharp remark.

‘He saw through my Dragon-tongue magic?! How can that be? He must have good instincts!’

Kha'nes wore a bitter smile as she pulled off the magical veil that covered her body. The young woman with eyes of a dragon wearing a thick robe appeared before Sungchul. Bertelgia who had been complaining quickly retreated into Sungchul's pocket at the sudden appearance of this monstrous person

“Hey there, human.” Kha'nes held up her palm as she threw out a friendly greeting.

“They call you the Enemy of the World?”

Chapter 102 – Followers Of Calamity (2)

“What’s your business with me?”

Sungchul spoke out abruptly while continuing to slurp down his noodles.

“I just came to see what you looked like. I was curious how the most infamous person in the world looked like.”

Kha’nes walked up casually and sat down across from him. Sungchul did not mind her at all. He didn’t feel any hostility from her, and she would need to transform before she could do any meaningful harm to him.

Kha’nes continued to observe him from close by.

‘He looks like an average human on the outside. Even his clothes are pretty ragged. I thought the thing in his pocket was a person, but I guess her outer form is a book. His stats also... I guess he’s wearing the Deceiver’s Veil?’

She couldn’t know his exact strength, but it was clear that Sungchul was not someone to take lightly.

‘I might have to fight against the Avian King, so it might not be a good idea to waste my strength on someone of this caliber.’

Kha’nes decided not to engage Sungchul in her mind. Sungchul continued to eat as Kha’nes watched.

Her voice could be heard in the midst of his meal.

“You don’t have to eat so fast. I didn’t come here to fight.”

Kha’nes’ attention shifted away from Sungchul to his food.

“What kind of recipe is this? This aroma is foreign to me.”

“It’s just normal food.”

Sungchul gulped down the rest of his noodles and began relishing the soup with a spoon.

“Mm.”

He judged that the taste was decent, and began to slurp down the soup from the helmet. Kha'nes who was watching this felt drool unwittingly gather in her mouth.

“Hey,” She called out to Sungchul.

“What?”

When Sungchul responded curtly, Kha'nes didn't hesitate and asked her question in a lively voice.

“Can I have a taste?”

“...”

Sungchul silently downed the rest of the soup.

“That's going too far!”

Kha'nes pouted out of annoyance, but as she did, Sungchul held something out toward her. On closer inspection, it was some fried noodles and a glass bottle filled with an unknown powder.

“If you want some, cook it yourself. It's not my hobby to cook ramen for women I don't know.”

He said as such before quietly opening up his coat. A golden gleam hidden within the coat blinded Kha'nes' eyes. Her jaw dropped.

‘No way... that's the Insignia of a High-class Chef?! And isn't that a Gold Class as well?!’

It had been 300 years since she had last met a High-class Chef that managed to reach the Gold class. It was already hard enough in this world to meet a High-class Chef, not to mention one of Gold class, so to meet a chef of this caliber was something of a miracle. Kha'nes could feel her apathetic heart of a dragon beginning to pound with excitement as she looked back and forth between the instant fried noodles and the soup powder.

‘This looks like a type of military rations. But I haven’t seen this preservation method before. Taking noodles, an ingredient not usually found in preserved food, and frying it in oil to make it last longer is very innovative.’

She broke off an end of the instant fried noodles and placed it in her mouth. She could taste the crunchiness and the flavor of oil combined with the savory flour-based noodles in her mouth.

“This is fried with bean oil?”

Kha’nes directed her comment toward Sungchul.

“That’s correct.”

‘Impressive.’ Sungchul thought, as he paid close attention to Kha’nes’s behavior. Kha’nes was investigating the soup powder inside the glass bottle at this moment. She dabbed an end of a finger onto the powder and made complicated expressions as she fell into deep thought while tasting it.

“Hmm, this is stock made from ground chicken bones with red pepper, garlic, ginger, among other things and made into a powder.”

It was incredibly accurate if not for a few missing ingredients. Sungchul acknowledged that the half-dragon in front of him possessed an incredibly sensitive palate.

“Wait.”

When Kha’nes was about to begin cooking, he added the proper amount of water into the helmet himself.

“I’ll do it. It’s not hard.”

Everything changed as he realized the person in front of him knew proper food. It also appeared that Kha’nes knew the implications of the broach that Sungchul wore on him. Even though it was a simple dish, Sungchul did not want others to judge poorly the taste of his food.

“Oh my, how friendly.”

Kha'nes smiled lightly with her eyes as she observed him cooking. Ramen cooking couldn't really be improved upon, and there wasn't much work involved. He waited for the water to boil, dropped in the noodle and soup powder, and gave it a few swirls in between. Sungchul held out the finished dish to Kha'nes after 4 minutes.

“Try it.”

Kha'nes revealed a huge smile as she pulled out the fork from within her clothes before digging in. Firm noodles that had been properly boiled were slurped through her lips. A flash of interest passed through her lizard-like eyes.

“It's tasty. This dish.”

“Of course.”

Sungchul turned his back toward her with his arms crossed. Kha'nes gulped down the entire bowl of ramen in a frenzy while carefully blowing on it.

“That was a great meal, Enemy of the World!”

Kha'nes patted her belly while expressing her gratitude. Sungchul peeked at her through the corner of his eyes, and he could see that she was extremely satisfied. He could feel his pride soaking into his heart as he turned back toward her.

“If you have no further business, I would appreciate it if you left this place.”

“I got it. I was about to leave anyways.”

“...”

“Aren't you curious about my business?” Kha'nes spoke subtly while looking at his back.

‘What a talkative dragon.’

Some dragons would not open their mouth once in a thousand years, but there are those who would blather on throughout the same thousand years. Kha'nes appeared to be of the latter type.

“In truth, I was planning on heading north. There is a root of Calamity that isn't well known yet.”

“A root of Calamity?”

Sungchul showed interest.

“That's right. A new Calamity was recorded within the Scroll of Calamity before it disappeared.”

“Is that even possible?”

“Not normally, but if humans keep trying to forcefully stop the progression of Calamity like now, there is bound to be background noise from time to time. The calamity that had appeared momentarily might have been a consequence of that”

“May I know which Calamity that was?”

Kha'nes briefly considered Sungchul's request before she opened her mouth to speak in a serious manner that was unlike her.

“The Final King. It is a Calamity regarding the Avian King with black wings.”

“Ah, that one.”

Her revelation took the winds out of his sails as the Calamity had already been resolved by his own hands. Sungchul's disappointment was soon revealed on his face. Kha'nes felt perplexed at his reaction and hastily threw out a retort.

“Eh? Why are you making that face? Aren't you interested? It's the Calamity of the Avian King!”

“Sorry, but it wasn't something I wanted to hear about. It seems like I've taken away too much of your time, so shouldn't get going already?”

Sungchul coldly chased her away. Kha'nes revealed several more information with a hurt expression on her face, but none of them could evoke Sungchul's interest.

The half-dragon Kha'nes had to climb down from the hill after being treated to a bowl of ramen.

“Visit the Tower of Recluse some time. I'll give you a good surprise if you cook some good food for me.”

“I'll keep that in mind.”

He had been planning on visiting the Tower of Recluse in a day or two regardless. He wanted to see the change on the Scroll of Calamity himself after eliminating the Devil King Hesthnius.

After the noisy Kha'nes had departed, silence returned to the peak of Harupaya Ridge. Sungchul let the time pass while sitting by the fire.

—

It had been the fourth day since Sungchul situated himself on Harupaya Ridge. He could sense an unusual amount of Observer's Eyes on him since very late last night. As morning approached, a group of magicians had moved to someplace not far away through Teleportation. Sungchul watched the approach of these unfamiliar magicians with an indifferent gaze in his seat.

The magicians were wary of Sungchul and approached him carefully. When they finally reached him, they showed him proper respect by speaking in a lower register.

“Lord of Heracles, I greet the Demolisher.”

Sungchul could immediately sense that the magician had approached him with ill intentions.

“What do you want?”

He urged the magician with a voice mixed with revulsion.

“It might be more appropriate to introduce ourselves before we

get down to business. We are a part of the Followers of Calamity that you detest so much.”

The Demonic Weapon Cassandra appeared in Sungchul’s hand.

“Get lost.”

The magicians trembled slightly at the sight of the fiery whip in Sungchul’s grip, but they pressed on despite their fears.

“We have only come here to deliver a message from a certain person.”

“What? A certain person? Speak plainly.”

Cassandra moved about like an angry snake and struck a nearby boulder. The entire boulder shattered at the moment of impact and rolled off the hill in pieces.

One of the magicians visibly wavered as though the tension had overwhelmed him. Among them a person who appeared to be the eldest broke the silence with his head still bowed.

“Our master, The One who Guides the Calamity, wishes to meet you personally.”

The One who Guides the Calamity. It was a title Sungchul had never heard before, but he had heard from Elijah earlier that the Followers of Calamity now had a leader.

‘Is the person mentioned by Elijah and this guy the one and the same?’

The face of a single woman passed by Sungchul’s memories. It was the face of a blonde woman with a pale skin as white as snow and dreamlike eyes that appeared and faded like smoke.

‘Vestiare.’

Sungchul glared at the magicians with eyes filled with hostility. The magicians didn’t dare to meet his gaze.

“Why is that woman looking to meet me?”

“W-we cannot dare to pretend that we understand that one’s intentions. We only wish to say that that one wishes to help you. We only hope that you don’t attack her on sight...”

The magician didn’t even manage to finish his thoughts when the Demonic Weapon Cassandra had split them all in half.

‘Srrrkt.’

The halves of every corpse rolled off the hill. He felt the metallic stench of blood brush past his nose as he turned around.

“Why don’t you start revealing yourself?”

The One that Guides the Calamity was already here. A blonde woman in a white robe appeared from behind a boulder like a mirage. The Seventh Hero Vestiare.

The Calamity-to-come revealed a cruel smile as she stepped toward Sungchul.

“As expected, you have good senses.”

Vestiare spoke with a soft smile on her face.

“Looking for an early grave?”

“You could see it that way.”

A magical formation appeared at the tip of her finger, and a single scroll appeared. This unusual scroll had a mixture of crimson and dark coloration. The scroll lifted itself into the air and floated toward Sungchul.

“I’ve heard you have been having much difficulty getting rid of the Devil King. You will be able to rid yourself of that problem much more quickly with this.”

Sungchul grabbed the scroll Vestiare had handed over, and when he did, information about the scroll appeared in his eyes.

[Scroll of Harmegegon]

Grade: Epic

Type: Scroll

Effect: Casts the Destructive Magic 'Harmegedon'

Note: It immediately unleashes the most powerful destructive magic, 'Harmegedon'.

Sungchul's eyes twitched.

'Harmegedon? Isn't that an 8th-grade magic? I've heard of its name, but I never got to see it in person.'

It was unprecedented territory unexplored by any School of Magic. This kind of fortune was so simply handed to Sungchul.

"One receives greater harm from magical attacks in ethereal form. This means that it's not strictly necessary to use Harmegedon, but isn't there nothing better to make sure the job is done right?"

Vestiare spoke in a dreamlike voice. Sungchul's hand that held the scroll trembled slightly.

"Why are you giving me this?"

Vestiare held a faint smile at Sungchul's question.

"Because we can only step up when the Devil King falls."

Chapter 103 – Followers Of Calamity (3)

Floating Palace. It was the dwelling of the Emperor and the heart of the most powerful nation within the continent, the Human Empire. A special guest had been invited to the Floating Palace by the Emperor and had been granted audience by him.

“Speak, Regressor.”

The Emperor who sat on a throne made of gold spoke in a low voice, and the young woman who was prostrated before him finally raised her head. Her identity was none other than Sujin Lee. She took care in speaking to the first among the Continental Champions and the one most deserving of the title of ‘the most powerful man in the Continent’.

“That’s right, your highness. Sungchul will take care of the Devil King all by himself after revealing himself to the world. This is the future I have seen with my own eyes.”

“How did Sungchul kill the Devil King?” asked the Emperor.

It was rare for the Emperor to inquire about the details. For a man who was the head of an imperial hegemony which was in control of the continent, he was only given vague reports on the situation. But he asked about such seemingly negligible detail nonetheless.

Sujin felt the Emperor’s curiosity weighing on her body like countless tons of weight, but she calmly proceeded to answer him.

“I do not know as I wasn’t able to see it myself.”

“Is that so?”

A brief look of disappointment flashed across his eyes. Sujin spoke again.

“However according to my companions, an explosion on a scale never witnessed before took place. They say a massive explosion

comparable to the atomic explosion in the world of the Summoned enveloped the surrounding area.”

“Is it magic? I can’t imagine that Sungchul brought a nuke with him. Well... more importantly, that kind of intricate device would become unusable due to the curse.”

“It becomes recorded historically as magic, but the important part is the aftermath.”

“Isn’t the result that the Devil King is killed?”

Sujin firmly shook her head at the Emperor’s question.

“The Enemy of the World also becomes swept up in the explosion and is left in a critical state.”

“Hoh.”

A strange light flashed across the Emperor’s eyes. Sujin nodded and spoke in a stern voice as though she had understood his thoughts.

“If we had pushed back against the Enemy of the World a little harder, the future I have seen might have been avoided.”

Sujin hadn’t seen it directly, but everyone of her period spoke of the same thing; that moment was the final opportunity to kill the Enemy of the World. If they had a bit more soldiers with a bit more talented fighters, they might have been able to squeeze the life out of Sungchul’s throat.

The Emperor looked at Sujin. There wasn’t a single mark of deceit in her eyes.

‘The first priority is to keep the Devil King breathing, but if that becomes impossible, it might not be a bad option to eliminate that guy who might become a threat.’

Once the decision was made, the Emperor rose from his throne. He gestured with his arm to command the generals bowing toward him in the vicinity.

“Sortie every deployable unit!”

The Generals of the Human Empire let out a shout at his command before rushing out in perfect order. It was a display of power befitting the strongest nation. Fleets of airships, the pride of the Human Empire, soon took to the air around the Floating Palace.

“We will deploy 5 fleets. The direction is north-northwest. The target is the Enemy of the World.”

The nose of the airships that had lifted into the air faced north-northwest. The powerful sound of the marching horn rang out in the entire area around the palace, and the Emperor ordered an attendant to hand Sujin some particular items. A single sword embedded with a red ruby and a single glass bottle filled with some black liquid. The Emperor watched Sujin put the items away while he spoke.

“I’ve been told that you have a unique ability. The sword might not be anything special, but it has a legendary sharpness, and this glass bottle contains poison of a legendary strength.” The intention behind his words was clear.

“When the opportunity arrives, kill my old friend.”

—

“Brilliant reasoning.”

Sungchul allowed himself a faint smile as he turned around; tucking the scroll away. His figure suddenly disappeared from Vestiare’s sight.

‘Grab!’

A rough grip clenched down onto Vestiare’s neck. He gave no time for her to reflect on the situation. Sungchul applied more pressure onto the hand holding her neck, and her slim neck was snapped like a flower. A pale apparition briefly appeared on Vestiare’s body before disappearing again. It was only then that

Sungchul realized that it wasn't Vestiare's true body.

'This is also an illusion. She's playing a clever trick that's difficult to see through at a glance with the Eye of Truth.'

Her consciousness had taken hold of another's living body as a vessel. The fog-like aura that was emanating from the entire body and her appearance that was still beautiful even from beneath it made it hard to distinguish the truth. The woman whose neck had been snapped by Sungchul was a different woman. He didn't recognize her face, but it would have been one of the Followers of Calamity.

Sungchul threw the corpse onto the ground and gazed at the illusion that was pulled away from the corpse with disinterest.

"I knew it'd turn out this way."

Vestiare's illusion spoke with a smile.

"But you'll end up moving according to our will."

"Me? Move to your will?" mocked Sungchul

Vestiare's illusion laughed coquettishly as she floated up into the air.

"I know you're diligently learning magic, but how much have you progressed in only a year's worth of time? At the most, you'd only have reached the level of a beginner magician. The road of magic is a difficult and winding path.

"..."

"Sadly for you, there isn't much time left for the humans. They haven't yet realized that delaying the Calamity isn't a solution."

"You say some interesting things."

It was something he had heard many times before, but Sungchul pretended like it was new information.

Vestiare's illusion began her tale as though she was dreaming.

“The world is crumbling. The tide of Calamity is crashing oppressively onto levees built by the humans. The foolish humans believe that it might be possible to buy time by plugging up the levee, but leaks will spring from all over until the flood of Calamity drowns the continent in death and anguish.”

“But, there hasn’t been any incident within 8 years. The way I see it, there’s still plenty of time left.”

Sungchul made an immediate judgement. He decided that Vestiare and the other Seven Heroes weren’t aware of his movements. They seemed to only know that he had overcome a magic related objective of the Seven Heroes, and other details that became widely known when he revealed himself to the world. There were many opportunities for Vestiare to appear before him if she had seen through his movements, but she had shown herself at Harupaya Ridge only after four days at that. It was only after the news had spread across the world that she had appeared.

‘It was a good thing that I adjusted the Deceiver’s Veil after I met with Kha’nes. These bastards don’t know much about me yet.’

She didn’t even seem to know that Sungchul had acquired Meteor. Their ability to gather information was sub par. Sungchul figured all this out while he stared her down. Vestiare had a mystical expression on her face as though she still believed that she had all the information at hand.

“That scroll is my gift to you. Please hurry up and kill the Devil King. If you don’t, even I can’t say how the Calamity will change.”

Sungchul looked at the scroll in his hand that contained some sinister power. It reeked. It reeked with a fetid rotting stench. If Sungchul had not obtained magic power, this might have been the sole, irrefutable offer. However, he had other options available to him.

“This scroll looks like a trap.”

Sungchul stared her down as he spoke. It was obvious, but her expression remained unchanged as she withstood his accusation.

“Every rose is bound to have thorns. To use it or not is up to you.”

“I see.”

Sungchul threw the scroll onto the ground.

Vestiare’s lips twitched slightly.

“You can’t take care of the Devil King without it.”

“Is that so?”

Sungchul glanced at the scroll without a shred of interest before answering unemotionally.

“I want to raise my Intuition.”

The wind blowing up the mountain ridge ruffled Sungchul’s hair and clothes as it blew past. On the other hand, Vestiare’s appearance was unaffected.

“The scroll doesn’t require Intuition.” she replied.

“No, this is my personal desire apart from the scroll. It’s been quite fun dabbling in magic recently.”

Vestiare wasn’t fully aware of Sungchul’s current situation, but when Sungchul brought up the topic in a cunning way, a warning light flashed across her eyes.

“Are you perhaps attempting to get rid of the Devil King by learning magic?”

“I’m just the type of person to stick to stat points, personally. I only feel good if I manage to raise it, even by a single point. In any case, I could consider using it if there was some quest.”

This was a battle that Vestiare could not win from the very beginning. It might have worked if she had approached him with the offer earlier, but her window of opportunity had already

passed.

“I don’t make bad offers.”

Sungchul was planning on taking his time to deal with the Demon King, even if it took another month or so.

‘This man... just what is he planning?’

Vestiare fell into deep thought trying to decipher his intentions.

‘Could it be that he already has the magic power to kill the Devil King?’

She could not see through Sungchul’s stats because of his Soul Contract – Deceiver’s Veil, but Sungchul shouldn’t be at that level yet. If Sungchul had, the Devil King would have long since departed from the living.

Another possibility was that this was an old-fashioned bluff. Vestiare had seen plenty of men trying to pull a fast one.

‘But, I can’t lower my guard just because this man is bluffing. I can’t know if this man had already reached the magic power to kill the Devil King somehow.’

Vestiare held a smile once again after organizing her thoughts.

“You’re saying that you’ll be satisfied with a quest that can raise Intuition, correct?”

Sungchul nodded. Vestiare then chanted a spell with a hushed voice that formed countless magic formations around her entire body.

Sungchul could see that these weren’t ordinary magic formations, but communications or an urgent request with a god.

‘Is she making a quest?’

It usually took a great deal of time and dedication for a human to make a quest. It was because they were an existence far apart from god, but Vestiare who had become a Calamity herself seemed to

have little difficulty in making a request to god. When the countless magic formations around her body had disappeared, Vestiare held a faint smile as she pointed below her own feet. There was an image resembling her own face below her feet. When Sungchul laid his hand on the image, bright letters appeared in his eyes.

[Admiration of Beauty – To draw 33 portraits of Vestiare who is the most beautiful in the world / Reward – +1 Intuition, Vestiare's portrait drawn on Jewel Papyrus]

The quest contents were one thing, but the rewards were also quite something. It only raised a single point of Intuition as he mentioned earlier even though it was possible for Vestiare to raise it by more than 10 points at a single time. The worthless portrait was just tossed in there.

Sungchul burst out laughing, and Vestiare watched him with leisure as she casually spoke again.

“I made the quest as you requested. You aren't someone that doesn't keep their word are you?”

“My, you've made a shit of a quest.”

Sungchul held a bitter smile and picked up the scroll that had fallen to the floor.

“I'll be waiting then.”

Vestiare flashed a captivating smile toward Sungchul and disappeared like smoke. Sungchul looked around the vicinity where she disappeared. Other than the gazes of devils in the distance, he couldn't feel any presence of magic.

“Bertelgia.”

Maybe from holding his expression for too long, he could feel a slight cramp on his lips.

“Hm? Why are you calling?”

“It’s time to learn drawing.”

Vestiare would never be able to imagine that that one intuition was exactly what Sungchul needed, nothing in this world that is worth having comes easy. Clouds in the southern skies rumbled as massive magic formations began to appear. Sungchul who had been sloppily drawing pictures of Vestiare looked toward the southern skies. Dozens of Airships had popped out from the magic formation. The Golden Flag of the Sun flapped high in the air. The main fleet of the Human Empire made its appearance on Harupaya Ridge.

Chapter 104 – Return Of The Defeated (1)

A single man was laughing in a rumbling voice in an airship with his hair waving in the wind.

“Kekeke”

His identity was Admiral of the 4th Fleet of the Human Empire Minamoto Daisuke. He had risen to his current position after accumulating unclear accomplishments that remain a topic of controversy to this day.

He calls himself a tactician, but when he introduces himself, he shares that his success is because he had read through so many books on warfare that his head is filled with the ‘[Three Strategies of Huang Shigong](#)’ and his gut with the ability to respond to anything. However, his strategies were one-dimensional and distasteful, and more than anything, they resulted in large casualties. If there was anything else of note, it was that he was a Summoned. He was summoned from Japan, as could be guessed from his name, but whether he is Japanese or not is a topic of debate. According to a Summoned from Japan that had spoken to him, all of Minamoto’s conversation is limited to ‘Yosh!’ and ‘Hai!’.

Regardless of all of these bad rumors about him, Minamoto is a truly powerful swordsman. With his long hip-length hair flying wildly in the wind combined with his shouts befitting that of a madman while swinging his katana, he looked like the incarnate of an Evil Yasha itself. He is a figure that has brought terror to both enemies and allies alike. This Minamoto arrived at the peak of Harupaya Ridge undertaking the weighty mission of subjugating the Enemy of the World. He held a cylindrical scope to his eye as he observed Sungchul and began to mutter under his breath.

“Mm. To be able to sit on the peak by himself while confronting a massive army. Isn’t this the ‘Empty Fort Strategy’ by Zhuge

Liang?”

His strategist mind began to work overtime, but his concentration didn't last very long. The overseer of the subjugation of the Enemy of the World, Dimitri Medioff, had summoned each fleet commander to the deck of his flagship, Andragoras. Minamoto was displeased, but he had no choice but to obey.

Minamoto kept grumbling as he stepped onto the miniature ferry to board the deck of Andragoras. The other fleet commanders were also gathered on the deck for a strategy meeting. The head of the meeting, Dimitri, looked at each commander in the eye as he spoke in a serious manner.

“According to the reports, the strength of the Enemy of the World well exceeds our expectations. I don't need to reiterate what kind of strength is capable of driving away a hundred thousand Devils alone. So, we will need to seek out a method to oppose the Enemy of the World with the utmost seriousness.”

Dimitri looked at each of the commanders after his speech. They all kept their silence. It was because none of them was able to come up with a good solution. Their opponent was a monster among monsters that had walked up to an army of a hundred thousand Devils as leisurely as one walks into one's home and had struck down their commander. Dimitri's gaze shifted over to Minamoto who was the last to arrive. Minamoto was filled with anticipation as he was prepared to relay some kind of plan he had just come up with and mulled over how to express it. But Dimitri tactfully avoided locking eyes. Unfortunately, Minamoto wasn't one to be so easily discouraged.

“Head Commander, I have a good idea.”

Dimitri briefly let his emotions show on his face.

‘What kind of stupid thing does this crazy bastard have to say this time?’

Dimitri didn't wish to open the floor to him, but Minamoto was still one of the fleet commanders. Dimitri let out a sigh as he spoke bluntly.

“Say your piece.”

“The way I see it, Sungchul is using the ‘Empty Fort Strategy’.”

“I see. That’s a brilliant opinion.”

Dimitri spoke drily while applauding before he turned away.

“But, I wasn’t quite done yet?”

“Ah, you had more to say? Looks like I made a mistake.”

Dimitri’s face continued to broadcast that he didn’t wish to hear any more of what the man had to say, but none of those signals entered Minamoto’s eyes.

“The only method to avoid getting caught by the ‘[Empty Fort Strategy](#)’ is to rush him down without giving him any moment of breath.”

Dimitri started a conversation with the other commanders, played around, and even closed his eyes pretending to sleep while Minamoto spoke, but Minamoto’s speech continued on regardless. When Dimitri’s patience had reached its limits, a senior adjunct walked in like a miracle.

“Reporting!”

“What happened?”

Dimitri greeted the adjunct brightly, but Minamoto seemed to be muttering something or the other while this occurred.

He quickly made some distance from Minamoto with rapid steps while gesturing the adjunct to speak.

“The Enemy of the World is gone!”

“What?”

Dimitri immediately moved portside and observed the spot

where Sungchul had been with a scope. He was gone. Sungchul who had been lingering around like a caged animal in a zoo had simply disappeared.

“The time to attack is now! Commander Medioff!”

Minamoto approached closer and continued to speak his nonsense. Dimitri sighed as he pointed to the peak of the ridge on the portside with his finger.

“Go by yourself then. No one will stop you.”

Minamoto only now discovered that Sungchul was no longer there. His brain immediately began to toss around millions of strategies of war that he had only read about in his books.

“This... is Sungchul’s trap! We must not pursue!”

—

A rocky valley filled with strange and bizarrely shaped rocks.

Sungchul, who was in some clearing hidden by rocks and its shadows, was focusing intensely on creating portraits. The topic was Vestiare’s visage, but Sungchul had no experience in art. He tried to copy the sample drawing left behind by Vestiare, but in the end, they all became some form of abstract art.

“God damn it!”

Sungchul threw down the abstract art that even he himself couldn’t identify and laid back onto the stone. As he prepared to take a breather, Bertelgia popped out of his pocket.

“Is the Demon Realm Frontline safe now?”

Sungchul, who had been staring up at the ashen sky through the crevice in the rock, shifted his head slightly and nodded.

“It is the main fleet of the Human Empire; the self-proclaimed protectors of Humanity and its allies. They might have put up all kinds of excuses to delay deploying their troops, but as they have made an appearance in the Demon Realm now, they shouldn’t just

turn back when they can clearly see the danger with their own eyes.”

The only reason that Sungchul decided to move locations was because he could see that the balance between the humans and the devils had been restored. There was no more reason for him to act as a human barrier. Sungchul had made a quick decision and made himself scarce.

However, a bigger obstacle stood before him. Sungchul watched Vestiare’s portrait which he had laid on top of a rock with tired eyes.

“That damned woman. She gave me one bitch of a quest.”

No matter how much he drew, he could not produce even one decent portrait. Not a single one of them had been accepted, and Sungchul had to draw a total of 33. His future looked bleak.

“You’re so good at cooking and alchemy, but it looks like your artistic ability is quite terrible.”

Bertelgia peeked over at Sungchul’s half-finished sketch of Vestiare which more closely resembled a goblin.

“...”

Sungchul did not speak any further. He stared blankly at the passing clouds through the crack between the rocks. After much time had passed by in this way, he heard the sound of paper rustling in the breeze. Sungchul, who had been resting with his eyes closed, turned his head and cracked his eyes open. A faint smile appeared on his lips.

Bertelgia was sketching something. She had placed a pencil between her two pages and held the drawing paper with a rock while she was scrawling something busily onto the page.

‘It looks like a kid playing with a crayon.’

Sungchul suddenly stood up from his seat and stole a peek at

what Bertelgia was doing. His eyes soon grew wide from shock.

‘T-this is...?!’

A detailed sketch that could not be compared to what Sungchul had drawn before was on the page.

“Ah, you’re up?”

Bertelgia delicately moved her body to allow for the subtle pencil work that drew Vestiare’s ruffled hair. It was a technique that Sungchul could never perform in this lifetime or the next. He waited for her to finish her drawing with his mouth shut.

The sketch was soon completed.

“Ta-da!”

Bertelgia rose high into the air to admire her work, but it appeared as though she wasn’t pleased with it.

“Hmm. The proportions don’t look quite right. I must have lost my edge since it’s been so long.”

Bertelgia pushed away the rock which held the paper with her body and let it be carried off with the wind. A forceful hand roughly grabbed the flying page.

“...”

It was Sungchul.

‘As expected, her skills aren’t normal.’

“What are you doing with that drawing? I was just playing, don’t look at it! It’s not even well made.”

Bertelgia tried to object with a pouty voice, but Sungchul did not relent and held the sketch in front of Vestiare’s portrait. Her artwork disappeared as glittering letters appeared in his eyes when he did so.

[You did well. What did you feel while you were drawing me?
Progress: 1/33]

The quest had accepted the drawing.

‘This was an unexpected boon.’

If Vestiare had put some effort into it, the quest would have been set up to only accept Sungchul’s drawings, but it had been a hastily-made quest. It might have been too bothersome for even Vestiare to put together a complex formation for a quest she made out of spite which granted a single point of Intuition. It required a lot of effort in order to check the trace of the soul within an object, such as embedding a familiar within the quest to verify the maker of the object.

‘That woman must not have imagined that there was a person willing to draw the pictures for me.’

Whatever the reason was, the solution to the problem that had been plaguing him for half of the day appeared to have been found.

“Bertelgia.”

Sungchul spoke with a composed voice. Bertelgia felt a premonition and replied with a trembling voice as she tensed her body.

“Hm...?”

“It looks like it’s finally time for you to earn your keep.”

“Huh? I don’t have any expenses. I’m a Living Book as you can clearly see.”

“Then you’ll have to pay fees for babysitting.”

“Who’s taking care of who!”

Bertelgia strongly tried to refuse him, but Sungchul’s will was not to back down. She soon became Sungchul’s art slave.

“Don’t even think about slacking before another 32 portraits.”

“You’re too much...”

Bertelgia let out a pitiful voice as she drew. Sungchul

comfortably laid on a boulder as he spoke.

“Don’t fret. I always pay my debts. I’ll do you one favor afterwards.”

“For real? My memory is wicked good, so don’t go denying it later.”

Bertelgia went as far as to record Sungchul’s promise onto her pages.

[5th Era. Sun of the Thirty-Ninth Blue Dragon. Moon of the Cloud Witch. Eighteenth Day. Sungchul promised to perform a single favor.]

“Since you’re making a promise, why not go as far as forming an oath?”

Bertelgia who had recorded Sungchul’s promise with the time and date onto a corner of her page tossed out a question.

“If you’re talking about an oath, I’m already bounded by such a thing.”

Sungchul pointed toward his chest while speaking.

“Really? With who?”

“Can’t say. Anyways, I’ll keep my promise so finish the drawings.”

“Ok. OK! I’ll draw it!”

‘Scribble Scribble.’

Bertelgia began to draw Vestiare’s portrait onto the drawing paper once again. As Vestiare’s beautiful visage was being recreated one by one, Bertelgia spoke up again.

“This woman. She looks a lot like my mama.”

“Really? You’re not trying to say that you’re Vestiare’s daughter or something, are you?”

“My mama is a human. This woman is a High Elf. How can she be

my mother when her race is completely different?”

“ ... ”

“Papa must have really liked this woman.”

“Is that right?”

“Yea. Papa followed around the Seven Heroes and adventured with them when he was younger. Demon Realm, Sea of Trees, Subterranean World, Land of the Dead, Floating Archipelago, etc. Here and there.”

“Is that why he called himself the Eighth Hero?”

“That might be why, but the Seven Heroes never considered him as one of them. They treated him like some toolbox that spat out convenient tools.”

“That’s quite pitiful.”

Sungchul recalled Eckheart’s quest that had strongly emphasized the name Eighth Hero.

‘How pitiful to have been denied camaraderie even though they fought the same enemies.’

Judging by Bertelgia’s words, they appeared to have known each other for decades, and yet it looked like he wasn’t considered a comrade.

“Here. All done.”

Bertelgia said blandly as she took her pencil off of the page and floated into the air. Vestiare’s portrait whose eyes were looking dreamily toward the front was left in her place. Bertelgia then peeked over at her own drawing while circling in the air as she spoke.

“In any case, my mama was prettier.”

Sungchul held a faint smile as he collected the picture and placed it on top of the sample. The picture melted away as snow does

leaving only bright letters in front of his eyes.

[Have you now grown accustomed to my appearance? Don't fall for me too deeply. If you set your standards too high, you might never marry! Progress 233]

“... talking full of shit.”

Sungchul had wanted to kill Sajators first out of the Seven Heroes, but he deeply considered revising his plans. However, even those thoughts quickly grew cold. A strange thought entered his mind within that brief serenity. How long had it been since he left a task meant for himself to another? Eight years? No, at least ten years must have passed. Bertelgia who had grown into a trustworthy companion over the course of a day was busily moving her body while drawing a portrait.

‘Scribble Scribble.’

The sound of the pencil scribbling through the page was the only sound present beside the blowing wind. Sungchul felt the flow of time with both his eyes closed. Faces of countless people and sceneries flashed in his mind leaving their traces. A voice of an energetic girl could be heard in the darkness.

“Ah~ This slave is the head of the rebel force claiming to have come from another world? Huh? Not the head, but the right-hand man? In any case, he's not my type. Do you even have any strength behind those thin arms?”

The moment he recalled that particular voice, he felt a lingering pain like a dagger digging deep into his chest. His breath immediately got caught in his throat, and his breathing grew ragged. The pencil used to trace the lines on the page stopped moving.

“Did you see a ghost in your dreams?”

Bertelgia asked bluntly.

“No.”

Sungchul took a deep breath and shook his head.

“It’s nothing.”

He said as such, but his heart was still pounding rapidly in his chest, and the Cross of Oath embedded inside his chest was radiating a pure light within the stirring of his thick blood.

[Three Strategies of Huang Shigong](#)

In China, there are collections of works referred to as “the Seven Military Classics”. Sun Tsu’s art of war is a part of this collection. Two of the contributors in this seven list is from the Three Kingdoms era, including ‘Methods of Sima Yi’, and ‘Three Strategies of Huang Shigong’ attributed to Zhuge Liang. Huang Shigong actually means “Duke of Yellow Rock”.

The Strategy reads as follows: (copy pasted from Wikipedia)

1 A leader must be both benevolent and awe-inspiring, according to what is appropriate.

2 Act according to the actual circumstances. Avoid responses which are based on imagination, memories of the past, or habits acquired in other circumstances. You must rely only on observation and perception and be willing to modify plans at any time.

3 Employ only the capable. This requires an accurate insight into others.

[Empty Fort Strategy](#)

One of China’s 36 stratagems (an informal oral tradition of loosely collected strategies), of which the strategies are often attributed to Sun Tsu or Zhuge Liang, but neither are actually real authors. They’re just used as examples to exemplify a certain use of the strategy.

Empty Fort typically is a way to lure enemies in as a form of deception. The version Zhuge Liang used was way riskier; He

opened the gates to his castle, had no soldiers or generals defend the wall, and had people sweep the open gatehouse as he drank tea and played music for the approaching army. Because Zhuge Liang had never gambled or did anything risky in the past, Sima Yi believed this was a trap of some sort and retreated, but in truth, Zhuge Liang had not even a thousand men defending this supply base. He remarks, this is not a strategy he could ever repeat in the future.

Chapter 105 – Return Of The Defeated (2)

Murmurs of dissent rippled through the Allied Fleet of the Human Empire that had organized at the peak of Harupaya Ridge. The source of this discontent was the Head Commander of the fleet, Dimitri Medioff. He had positioned three fleets on the peak in order to keep the Devil Army in check while the rest of the army was ordered to pursue Sungchul, but a completely unexpected person was nominated to lead the pursuit.

The one who was handed the command was the next most hated man beside the Enemy of the World. That man was none other than Martin Breggas; the coward who had abandoned the Demon Realm Frontlines without a second thought despite his role as the head commander.

The men whispered behind Dimitri's back that he was suffering from diplomacy fever. But no one dared to openly oppose his decisions.

“All of this is the will of the Great Emperor.”

It was because the Emperor himself had issued this order. Martin had fiercely lobbied on this front. He begged for cooperation from the Human Empire by offering an enormous tribute, economic rights, and absolute obedience in the next year's world council meeting.

Martin desired only one thing: to restore his name. As a lord who had thrown aside all of his subordinates and territory alike, he needed a victory large enough to wash away his sins. The subjugation of the Enemy of the World was his sole chance to clean the slate.

He had but a single concern. According to rumors, Sungchul had become some transcendent powerhouse. All those who had witnessed him fight spoke the same thing that the Enemy of the World is a Transcende...no he has become something more.

But Martin had never seen Sungchul fight with his own eyes.

“I can’t not accept that Sungchul has grown stronger to a certain extent, but that man is still human. Mortals aren’t perfect; he must have a weakness.”

Martin led two fleets of the Human Empire by sky and the Militia of Trowyn along with few elite veteran soldiers by land as he headed north-east to pursue Sungchul. He had expertly narrowed down the possible locations where Sungchul could be hiding thanks to his knowledge of the surrounding area as the Commander in Chief of the Frontline of the Demon Realm and quickly began the search.

Sungchul, who was taking a rare break, soon confronted the pursuers. The roar of a flying Wyvern tore through the sky. Dozens of Wyvern Knights flew past the crack in the rock through which he watched the sky. The pursuers had also managed to reach him by land.

“He couldn’t have gotten much further! Don’t leave a single stone unturned in this area and find him.”

Elven rangers led by three-horned deer went through the area like a comb.

“Mm. No matter how you see it, I don’t think this is the time to be drawing pictures?”

Bertelgia stopped working. Sungchul also had the same thought.

“They’re being such a bother.”

However, he didn’t intend to kill them. They were mere pawns following the will of those in power, and it wasn’t Sungchul’s way to kill the innocent, unlike those in evil organizations such as the Followers of Calamity.

Sungchul lifted his body up from the rock and gestured toward Bertelgia.

“Let’s go.”

“Where to?”

“North East.”

Sungchul was thinking of heading to the Storm Battlefront. The Great Forest Belt of the Varan-Aran Tribal Alliance was the best for hiding, but it might not prove to be so great once the Elves, who are familiar with the forest like the back of their hand, begin to track him. Sungchul who had decided on his destination stepped forth without a second thought.

—

The scene of a familiar mountain range opened before his eyes. Below, the dwarven encampment caught the last few rays of light from the sunset, making it glitter with a mysterious and profound light. This was the area supervising the Storm Battlefront. It was an extremely rough mountainous region referred to as ‘the source of all mountains’.

Sungchul had made camp at various points along this area. It was the only option left to the man driven away under the label of Enemy of the World. He headed toward one of the camps he had prepared in the past. It was located on the edge of the mountain cliff that overlooked a fortress named Archon Crack. It was a dark and damp place due to the unique geological shape of the mountain that didn’t even allow a single hour of sunlight to reach the ground.

Sungchul had dug a cave into this shady spot and made a storage for fermented food. The cave was packed to the brim with Jeotgal made with salted oysters, that come into season during the fall, and salted fish of various species caught all throughout the Demon Realm that he had prepared with a sense of experimentation.

Sungchul started a fire and prepared food when the sun started to set. He stuck a finger into one of the pots filled with brine on the

shelves as he was cooking rice and was instantly immersed in its exquisite flavor. Bertelgia was sitting under the dim light of an oil lamp still drawing portraits of Vestiare. She had managed to complete only five till now at a rate of one per hour. Bertelgia also took a break between each drawing that lasted thirty minutes to an hour making it so that she only drew a single portrait every two hours realistically, and also additionally threw a tantrum saying that she couldn't draw more than four pages a day.

Sungchul didn't rush her. He was well aware that it would be much faster to gain the Intuition by simply waiting for quest completion through the paintings.

'I waited 8 years. It's a drop in the well to wait a week more.'

Sungchul affirmed these thoughts as he stuffed a spoonful of rice with some of the [Jeotgal](#). The warm and fluffy flavor of the rice and the salty deliciousness of the Jeotgal stirred his salivary glands as well as his taste buds.

[The score of this dish is... 5 points!]

The judgement of the Chef Class was harsh, but what could he do? Sungchul cleaned out his bowl of rice with a satisfied smile on his face. But while he was eating Sungchul discovered a small but important change occurring in the scenery that he was observing. The Dwarven fortress that should be lit brightly with torches and lamps was still steeped in darkness.

'Was the fortress taken?'

The recent assault by the Devil Army had caused the state of the Demon Realm Frontline to become unstable on an unprecedented level. It was at a point where the disappearance of a small fortress or two wouldn't seem strange.

The next day, Sungchul turned in the seventh portrait for the quest and headed toward the direction of the fortress in the spirit of exploration. Bertelgia who had just completed a drawing joined

in on the momentary rest.

As Sungchul expected, not a single dwarf could be found within Archon Crack. He discovered that the outer walls of the fortress had suffered severe damage from magic and material attacks and found several corpses with the scraps of numbered clothing usually seen on the members of the Suicide Unit deeper into the fortress. But, there were too few of them.

It appeared as though the majority of the dwarves who had been defending the fortress had managed to escape.

‘They escaped quite cleanly despite being attacked by Devils.’

Sungchul entered the fortress as though it was his own home, and headed toward the underground storage. The underground storage was where the Dark Beer brewed by the dwarves were stored. He had stolen a few of these oak barrels whole whenever he felt thirsty. Thankfully, no dwarf had managed to discover him, so this thievery was not added to Dwarven Book of Grudges.

Sungchul felt an uncomfortable presence when he exited the fortress with the Dark Beer in tow. The unique damp aura of the Devils was spread thickly in his surroundings. The way that this aura made even the air stale was outside of the norm.

‘It looks like this isn’t an ordinary Devil. Maybe a Devil Lord or one on par with a High Devil has shown up.’

High Devils and Devil Lords were often lumped together when assessing powerful demons, but strictly speaking, that wasn’t correct. High Devils were those with stats that surpassed what the humans referred to as ‘Transcendent’ or ‘Superhuman’ thresholds, and among them, the ones that held territory were further separated into Devil Lords. No matter how strong a Devil became, without land they would simply be referred to as a High Devil, whereas even a weaker Devil with land was titled a Devil Lord. However, in order to become one of the lords of the ‘72 Seats of Power’ in the Demon world, a great deal of strength was absolutely

necessary.

Among the hundreds of High Devils, only those within the 72nd ranking could hold lordship over a territory within the Demon Realm, and only one that managed to subjugate all of the 72 Devil Lords was able to become the sole ruler of the Demons known as the Demon King. However, Sungchul was someone who stood over even above their King, and thus this distinction held no meaning. Whether it was a High Devil or the Devil Lord, they would all be removed from this world with a swing of his hammer.

Sungchul took in the presence of this powerful Devil and walked over to the direction of the source while holding the oak barrel with leisure; boldly making his presence known. Soon, an ominous shadow loomed over the fortification as a demon revealed itself before Sungchul. Sungchul's eyes wavered the moment he saw the Devil.

‘That guy is...?’

His appearance had changed drastically, making it hard to recognize him, but there was no doubt. The massive Devil that loitered before the crumbling walls of the castle was someone Sungchul already knew.

‘Elijah Breggas.’

He had heard it through rumors. It was the story of an eyeless Devil that had been attacking a Dwarven fortress. It was said that he shrieked an odd noise while carrying the body of a beautiful woman on his back.

‘So he was in this kind of place.’

Elijah had yet to feel Sungchul's presence, so Sungchul observed him from beside a shadow drawn by a castle wall. The youthful air from his adolescent form could be found no longer. Instead, he had the figure of an angry Devil whose torso was 4 meters on its own, and the eye sockets that he had emptied himself was filled with

darkness that was discomfoting to behold. His back held a corpse of a woman tied down in metal chains. Her face was covered by her hair, but looking at the virtuous attire of a female knight on the corpse, it wasn't difficult to guess that it was the body of Sophia Breggas.

“That Devil. It's that one sibling isn't it?”

Bertelgia must have figured out the identity of the Devil after seeing Sophia's corpse. Elijah was busily stacking rocks onto the collapsed wall with his massive arms. The Devil spoke.

“Sophia. Look at this! Our castle is being completed. Once the castle walls are repaired a bit more, we'll be able to hold land without the help of that man!”

The corpse of Sophia that hung behind him did not respond. It swung limply from side to side along with the Devil's movement, but Elijah continued to speak with an excited voice for some reason.

“This is where it all begins. Starting from this castle, I'll take over every castle in this area one by one. Then I'll give you a castle too. We'll make a country, just the two of us! What kind of country? I'm still thinking on it. I like the Human Empire that the Summoned have created, but I also really like the Hegemony the evil 'Holy Luteginea Kingdom' once held.”

The eyeless Devil that had been stacking stones stood dumbly and scratched his head while making a grotesque smile before speaking.

“Regardless, whatever country I make will be better than that man's.”

Sungchul who had been watching from a distance realized that Elijah's mind had been completely devoured by the Devil's flesh. He hoisted the oak barren filled with the Dark Beer and silently left the fortress.

As he climbed the mountain road leading toward his camp, Berltegia popped out to speak.

“Was it Sophia? That girl... she’s so pitiful.”

“...”

Bertelgia poked his shoulder with one of her corners when he didn’t say a word.

“Couldn’t you have just saved her? So terrible!”

“Dying was the best recourse for her.”

Sungchul spoke in a firm voice.

‘There are times when reality is much harsher than death.’

It was at that moment when his eyes caught sight of something he wasn’t too pleased to see. Toward the southwestern sky, the fleet of the Human Empire pierced through the inky clouds. They were the ones pursuing him. There was also an army holding a flag with a winged skull marching below them. Sungchul who was watching them approach with indifferent eyes discovered a single figure among them and clicked his tongue.

“It is most likely that the Enemy of the World has hidden himself here. It doesn’t matter how many days or nights it takes. Turn over every rock and search every cave. Our labor shall soon be rewarded.”

The one who was making the speech toward the marching army at the lead was none other than the father that the Breggas siblings hated so dearly. The Lord Marquis Martin Breggas.

He gazed at the distant fortress of the Dwarves and led his army toward it; unaware of what was waiting ahead.

Jeotgal is a type of korean preserved food made with aquatic creatures (fish or oysters etc). Typically the food would be salted, but that’s where the commonalities end. Some Jeotgal are made into powder, others are made into wet paste. Some add spices

where others only use salt. Although it could be eaten as is, it's also often used as flavorant to other foods, most famous being shrimp Jeotgal being used in many kimchi recipes.

Chapter 106 – Bid For Redemption (3)

‘Scratch Scratch’

Regardless of the situation at the Storm Battlefront, Bertelgia’s pencil was busy with her portrait on a sketchpad. Sungchul stood on the mountainside with fierce winds watching the situation unfold below him.

Martin, as befitting of someone who was born and raised on the battlefield, sent a small number of patrols toward the fortress first to gauge any potential dangers ahead. The five-member unit of patrols composed of Dwarves and Elves entered the fortress, and two of them ran out of the fortress in a panic after ten minutes. They ran toward Martin Breggas with an urgent message while being soaked in blood. Their message didn’t reach Sungchul’s ears, but he could roughly guess what they had to say. They had met him. Elijah Breggas who had become a High Devil.

As Martin was preparing his entire army for battle, he also sent a signal toward the Human Empire fleet waiting in the sky. The fleet made some distance from the fortress. If the precious airships happened to fall by chance through this High Devil’s magic, the cornered Martin’s already miniscule chances of success would diminish even further. Martin was planning on using the forces he had on hand to face the High Devil hiding within the fortress. However, there was something bothering him.

‘There is no way a High Devil is moving alone here. Devils are prone to forming packs, and it is common knowledge that they gather more subjects as they become more powerful. If this Devil is at the rank of High Devil, he would have at least a thousand to ten thousand followers.’

As his thoughts trailed on, his hesitation grew longer. The people around him carefully urged him to come to a decision. Despite this, Martin decided to inspect the vicinity once more with the patrols

he had with him. It was in this process that a Dragon Knight discovered Sungchul accidentally. He was caught up in turbulence causing him to fall behind from his group allowing him to catch sight of Sungchul hidden among the strange rock formations.

Sungchul was standing outside as he noticed the flight path of the Dragon Knights and never imagined that they would be able to see him, only to be discovered by this convergence of coincidences. Fortunately, it wasn't as though Martin could strike at Sungchul whether he knew Sungchul's location or not. To move his main force, the Civil Militia of Trowyn, toward the mountainside that Sungchul was in, they would have to go through the fortress that was impeding their path across the rugged valley, Archon Crack. However, there was an unknown Devil holding his ground within the fortress.

Martin was now in a troublesome situation where he would have to get rid of the High Devil first before he could get a chance at taking down Sungchul. It might have been a monumentally easier task if they were on an open field, but to take care of a High Devil in the cloistered fortress was incredibly difficult. It might have been the best option for Martin himself to step up for the job, but Martin was not the type of person that would face this level of danger.

It wasn't an option to utilize the Air Fleet of the Human Empire. It was also problematic to lose soldiers from the Human Empire's forces, but it was unacceptable for Martin to have the credit taken away from him. It was for this purpose that he did not alert the fleet that he discovered Sungchul.

'It's a miracle that the leader of the dispatched forces is an idiot.'

The one in command of the dispatched forces was none other than Minamoto Daisuke who was known as a fool. He had thought that Dmitri Medioff had left him in charge of the dispatched forces as a recognition of his abilities, but in truth, he was being sent away as a nuisance. Minamoto was sharpening his beloved weapon

– Yodo Kamaitachi which was an imitation of the Japanese Katana on top of the deck while waiting for his bout with the Enemy of the World.

“Just you wait, Yodo Kamaitachi. Soon... you’ll be feasting on the blood of that fucking bastard, Sungchul! Kekeke...”

Minamoto’s eyes which were burning with madness was fixated onto a single scene in the past about ten years ago. A battlefield filled with bodies. Blazing sky. Warriors tempering their breath in preparation for the final battle.

“I’ll settle the score with you for what happened at Lagrange...!”

Minamoto’s entire body was burning with such passion, but he wasn’t aware that Sungchul was right under his nose.

Martin let out a sigh of relief only after confirming that the fleet led by Minamoto had shown no sign of movement.

“It looks like god hasn’t forsaken me yet. Seeing as I got picked an idiot to accompany me among all those other admirals, but the real problem starts from here.”

Martin stared at the sheer cliff that Sungchul was situated in with his blue-gray eyes. Sungchul was fully aware he was discovered, yet chose not to move from his spot. The reality was that in order to attack Sungchul, Martin would have to take on the High Devil lurking inside the fortress, Archon Crack.

Minamoto was a Summoned who had arrived in this world at a similar time period, but the difference between their potentials was like the difference between the heavens and the earth itself. Sungchul had even gone as far as to lay on a flat rock to comfortably spectate the spectacle unfolding on this side. Martin couldn’t see what Sungchul’s facial expression was like, but he predicted that Sungchul was likely smiling, fully aware of what Martin was doing and what the consequences were. Martin felt like shit.

‘Sungchul... that bastard...!!’

He immediately sent another message to the Human Empire fleet; advising them to distance themselves a bit further. It was another small miracle that Minamoto hadn’t detected anything despite the fact that Sungchul had now revealed himself publicly. Minamoto acquiesced Martin’s report and moved the fleet to an open space very far away.

“...”

Sungchul watched the entire scene, amused.

“Shouldn’t we start running again? We’ve been discovered here, right?”

Bertelgia had completed another picture and clasped it between her pages as she presented it.

“It’s the 10th page with this one!”

Sungchul brought the drawing to the original portrait to turn it in and scattered the detailed message that appeared in front of his eyes with the wave of his hand before speaking calmly.

“Martin has to cross through that fortress in order to meet me here; meaning he will face his karmic punishment in the process. And...”

Sungchul’s eyes turned beyond the mountains big and small to the dust cloud lingering there. There was a figure of a fortress with eight legs looming between the dust clouds. It was the Mobile Fortress of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights. The Order who had become subordinates of the Devils were heading in this direction. Their objective was clear.

“... It seems like there is more than one karmic retribution waiting for him though.”

The Lord Marquis’ fortune of having discovered Sungchul had turned to poison. He was stuck hesitating between a High Devil

that stood in his path and the Order of the Iron Blood Knights coming from the side without having made a decision. He wanted to retreat, but then he would lose Sungchul that he had worked so hard to find but to stay meant committing to a meaningless battle against the Order of the Iron Blood Knights.

“Should we request aid from Admiral Minamoto?”

A young adjunct lacking tact suddenly spoke. Martin’s face grew stiff. Displeasure permeated the surrounding air making the atmosphere heavy and suffocating. Martin pointed toward that tactless adjunct in that heavy silence.

“I’ll give you a small number of men. Go into the fortress and lure the High Devil out.”

“Sir...?”

That adjunct was the child of a reputable family within Trowyn. His placement in the position that was beyond his age and ability was all because of his parents who sponsored Martin, but such realities were just sentiments currently.

“Go and immediately carry out the order. You can also choose to die here by my hands instead.”

Martin reached toward the hilt of his blade while giving a murderous glare. The young adjunct who believed that he would make it out this at the very least ran out of the tent in a panic. A suicidal bait tactic was formulated under the gaze of thousands of soldiers. The young adjunct entered the dark fortress with a small number of men with a pale face. It didn’t take long before an unrecognizable piece of meat was spat out through the dark hole. The soldiers could hear the sound of chains in that darkness, and two sunken lights lingering from within.

“This is our castle. Those who trespass our castle will not be forgiven.”

The High Devil’s voice rang out in the darkness. The voice was

clearly transmitted into Martin's ears as well. He felt goosebumps breaking out all over his body. It was because the voice was remarkably similar to a voice he was very familiar with.

‘It couldn't be... It can't be!’

He found himself approaching the entrance of the fortress before he realized it.

“Lord Marquis! It is dangerous to enter alone!”

Martin snapped awake and retreated from the entrance when the adjuncts around him stopped him.

“It's fine whether it's a torch or magic. Bring everything that can illuminate the darkness and follow me.”

Martin entered the fortress accompanied by dozens of warriors and magicians. Normally, he would never do this, but the voice he had heard was compelling enough for him to enter the perilous darkness.

The Devil's rough breathing and the sound of metallic chains grew closer. The knight at the vanguard who held a roaring torch was suddenly swallowed up by something in the darkness and disappeared.

“Prepare for battle! Prepare for battle!”

The soldiers formed a circular formation with Martin Breggas in the center in an effort to protect their lord from the worst-case scenario. A massive figure could be seen beyond the torches and magic lights that lit the surroundings. The sound of saliva being swallowed could be heard from various places. It was the High Devil.

Martin held his hand on the hilt of his blade and observed the dark figure with his breath held. The Devil finally revealed itself under the firelight. A brawny arm wrapped in crimson light and clothing that had been torn away came into sight first. Martin's eyes were locked onto the fluttering scraps of clothing. On the

corner of the clothing, there was a patch with an image of a winged skull on a black background stitched onto it. Martin who caught sight of this felt a sinking feeling that continued without end.

‘That can’t be. That kid... is dead. In the Demonic Realm.’

Aaron Genghis the vice-captain of the Suicide Unit, who was in charge of Elijah’s murder, had left the Demon Battlefield as though he was fleeing from something, but it was undeniable that Elijah had crossed into the Demon Realm. That place wasn’t something that just anyone could survive.

The High Devil took a step closer and his face veiled under the darkness was revealed. The hideous face with its eyes carved out was looking towards Martin’s direction expressionlessly.

“Another intruder? Who dares trespass my domain!”

The High Devil spoke with a calm and grounded demeanor ill-fitting his grotesque appearance.

“Lord Marquis.”

Parlim Dargott carefully broached the topic with Martin. He had also sensed it.

Martin pulled his blade and spoke calmly toward the son he loved the most.

“You. Head outside.”

“But...!”

“Head outside and prepare for the movements of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights who are approaching from the north.”

Martin spoke resolutely. After confirming that Parlim had left the fortress with a small number of men, he moved forward.

“Who are you?”

His voice was weak and trembling, different than usual.

“Me?”

The High Devil tilted his head toward where the sound originated. The metal chain wrapped around his shoulder and waist shook as he moved. Martin could see what appeared to be the hair of a woman beyond the metal chains. It was a familiar blonde. The face of the blushing woman on the farm who lowered her head toward him when he inspected the farmlands suddenly flashed across his eyes.

“Are you referring to me?”

The Devil spoke again. Martin nodded. The Devil’s mouth slowly opened, and he spoke the words he had expected yet could not accept.

“I am Elijah Breggas, and this is my most beloved and reliable sister, Sophia Breggas.”

The Devil turned his back, and the limbs and head of Sophia shook like a doll as she hung on his back.

Martin’s eyes flared up.

“K-kuh.”

Soon, his arms and legs trembled and a strange sound burst forth.

‘Clank.’

The blade in his hand fell on the ground. His body collapsed and had to be supported by his subordinates.

“Who are you? I have definitely seen you before. I have certainly heard your voice before. I can’t see you right now because I have no eyes.”

Elijah reached out with his hand and scratched his head. When the Devil’s nails scratched his head that was covered in crimson fur, skin flakes like rock salt with a pungent stench fell off.

“Kkkkuuu....”

Martin discovered that he could speak no more. Reality harsher

than death had stolen his speech. His heart felt taut, and his mind unfocused. He felt as he would die if he gazed upon this creature even a second longer. His hand gestured for him to be dragged away from this place, and his soldiers supported him in leaving the fortress.

“Who are you? Why do you leave without a reply?”

The High Devil followed in pursuit. The soldiers stood their ground, but they were crushed under the High Devil’s toenails and turned to meat. It was only through great sacrifice that Martin was able to walk out of the fortress alive.

“Kkku... kkuuuuu...!”

Martin who was now heading toward his tent, borrowing the shoulders of his men, had already died in some sense.

“....”

Sungchul was watching this scene unfold with an indifferent gaze.

—

Three days passed.

“Tada! How is it? The new technique from Miss Bertelgia?”

Bertelgia who had been forcibly conscripted into labor for many hours now had come up with a new technique as though to prove that she was a clever child. The new method wasn’t to draw the face, eyes, nose, and mouth using her hand like a human, but to take her form in consideration and draw the portrait in its entirety from top to bottom and left to right. She didn’t realize it herself, but her movements were reminiscent to that of a printer.

“With this, it’s the twenty-sixth page.”

Sungchul turned in the new picture on top of the original and continued to observe below. Ominous clouds of war were drawing in as the Mobile Fortress of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights

stood tall behind Martin's base where he had holed himself in after receiving the trauma. Both sides were waiting with bated breath and were about to commit to battle soon. Sungchul looked over at Bertelgia and asked.

“How much longer do you think you'll need?”

“With the new Bertelgia's expression technique, maybe 2 hours?”

“It might be ok to take it slow.”

Sungchul chewed on dried date palm and watched the scene below his feet unfold. The Iron Blood Knights that held the brand of the Devils on their forehead were making a formation under the Mobile Fortress while roaring in anger.

“Death to the traitor, Martin Breggas!” “We repay what is owed!”
“Hey, Breggas! We'll make you regret underestimating us!”

Martin's bid for redemption was going awry in the worst way imaginable.

Chapter 107 – Debt of Punishment (1)

The battle began with bombardment from the Mobile Fortress that the Order of the Iron Blood Knights was so proud of. The cannons lined on top of the moving castle's walls fired all manner of artillery at Martin Breggas' camp.

There was a secret technique solemnly guarded by the Order of the Iron Blood Knights hidden within their cannonballs. It was a method to store a time-delayed scroll within the explosive.

Utilizing this method the Iron Blood cannonballs made the first impact when it fell, then a secondary impact after the scroll activated; allowing for a devastating advantage. Of course, the might of the second impact was completely dependent on the strength of the spell held within the scroll.

During the height of their power, the Iron Blood Knights were able to employ a great number of magicians who provided them with a large number of scrolls. However, as the Order declined their technique had all but disappeared. But thanks to the alliance with the Devils, the Order was able to boast firepower far stronger than they had ever fielded before.

‘Boom Boom Boom!!’

A tornado made of fire emerged from the where a bomb landed and began to burn everything in its vicinity. An explosion powerful enough to cause a small quake burst forth from one of the shells, and another shell exploded in a burst of frost followed by a blast of icy shrapnel sharp enough to mercilessly tear apart every human in its vicinity. Every single one of the artillery shells contained powerful scrolls that sealed devastating magic of the Devils. The average ranged from 4th grade to 5th grade. Some even had destructive magic that reached 6th grade.

“How does it taste? Dogs of the Marquis!”

“Did you think that it would be so easy to steal what the Order of Iron Blood Knights had spilled sweats of blood to attain?”

“You will soon face a storm!”

Just the bombardment from the Order of the Iron Blood Knights was enough to drive Martin’s forces into chaos. Martin, who had been tending to his trauma within his tent, realized that the situation was quite dire and returned to the field.

He looked haggard and ill as he had been refusing food and drink for the past three days, but he was a battle-hardened warrior. He immediately gathered a healer and a witch and requested a stimulant, and they each brought one made from their own recipe. Martin tested both stimulants and selected the witch’s.

“The side-effects will incur after a day.”

The witch blinked in hesitation as she spoke.

“Doesn’t matter.”

He downed two bottles of the stimulant and headed toward the chaotic one-sided battle.

“Lord Marquis!”

Parlim Dargott was putting forth his best effort in commanding the frontline. His attire was already dirty with dust, and his forehead was spotted with beads of sweat. Martin brushed that sweat off from such his child with his hand and spoke with a magnanimous expression on his face.

“You’ve done well. I will take over from this point. You will handle the threats at the rear.”

“Understood.”

Parlim spoke with a wide smile, but he hesitated at the last moment. Martin patted his shoulder and spoke softly.

“From this point forward, you may call me father. Don’t fear the gaze of others any longer.”

Parlim whose expression had become dark turned bright once again. It was a refreshing smile that would turn the hearts of men and women alike.

‘I didn’t choose incorrectly.’

Martin gathered his thoughts and headed toward battle. His adjuncts were waiting for him.

“Lord Marquis!”

“You’ve arrived?”

Regardless of what anyone said, Martin Breggas was the head commander of the Demonic Frontlines. His reputation had been blemished by his recent choice on the battlefield, but he had mediated the elves, dwarves, and the summoned, each with strong individualities, and defended and stabilized the safety of the Demonic Frontlines like an iron cage for the past eight years. That was not a task anyone could perform.

“Send an immediate transmission to Admiral Minamoto. We are currently in battle and in need of reinforcements.”

He had nothing more to lose, and so he did not act on his greed. Martin felt unencumbered.

‘My ambitions had led me to this point, but that ambition has now burned me whole. I will no longer adhere to such ambitions.’

‘I will retire once this battle ends.’

Martin muttered to himself as though he was making a promise before steadying the wavering battleline. Minamoto Daisuke of the Human Empire arrived in a timely manner. He charged forward into the Order’s front lines ignoring the barrage of artillery pouring out from the fleet.

“Kiiiiiyyott!”

Youdo Kamaitachi was pulled from its scabbard. The blade, red like blood, poured out a thick aura of hostility.

“I am unbreakable...!”

Minamoto was steeped in madness as he began to perform the dance of death; whatever his blade touched met a bloody end. In the face of Minamoto’s oppressive performance, the Order suffered helplessly. Sungchul’s eyes grew cold as he watched the scene unfold from a distance.

‘Taeksu Kim. He ended up bestowing a position to this bastard.’

Before the formation of the Human Empire, it was the era of the Kingdom of Rutheginea. It was a dark time where those in power ruled with absolute authority while those below fell into defeat and corruption. The Summoned swore to end this era and stood against the great evil as one, but the Holy Kingdom of Rutheginea was powerful, and the Summoned had to endure a tiring battle. Traitors appeared in the process. Taeksu Kim, the man known currently as Minamoto Daisuke, was a vile traitor that had sold out his comrade Summoned for his own benefit.

“Here, take it.”

Bertelgia snapped Sungchul awake from reminiscing about the past. She had stuffed several pages of drawings in between her pages and carried them over. He realized that it contained six pages when he received it.

“Huh? This soon?”

It was a speed that was hard to believe even if with proof. Bertelgia allowed herself to swagger as she boasted.

“Ahem! It’s the might of the new expression technique developed by the one and only Ms. Bertelgia. I calmly looked at myself and realized that my current form wasn’t human anymore, so is there any need to keep drawing like one? It was from this line of questioning that it hit me. I was able to record memory itself differently from humans and those records...”

Her rambling grew long. Sungchul closed his ears in the middle

of her rant and began to place the pictures that appeared to have been copied from a printer on top of the original portrait one by one. All six of the images seemed to melt away before his eyes; leaving behind their own message. Sungchul didn't read any of them.

'I remember there was a saying that getting older means you don't have to see or do things you don't want to see or do.'

"I think I can finish the last picture in under an hour! With Ms. Bertelgia's superior expression technique that is."

"Brilliant, Bertelgia."

Sungchul who was averse to compliments unexpectedly threw out a word of praise toward her. Bertelgia grew even more elated and began to float into the air before shooting down toward the next drawing paper.

"Let's quickly get this over with and get out of this battlefield. I'm so sick of this war!"

It appeared that there was another reason why Bertelgia was rushing. Sungchul nodded and turned his gaze toward the battlefield.

The Order of the Iron Blood Knights that had been ruthlessly pressuring Martin was surrounded and was being slaughtered from both sides. Veteran soldiers led by Martin formed a barrier like an iron wall to hold down the Order, and the ground forces led by Minamoto swept in from the rear. Meanwhile, the airships, the symbol of the Human Empire, continued their artillery fire to demolish the Mobile Fortresses.

The battle was about to reach its conclusion. It looked as though Martin would force his way through the fortress to reach this side, but the portraits were already mostly finished. The situation had been delayed long enough that Primordial light was inches away from his grasp. However, something unexpected occurred on the

battlefield. A massive being appeared in the rear of Martin's soldiers. Its identity was none other than Elijah Breggas.

“Who dares be so foolhardy as to fight upon my land?!”

Elijah who had been lurking within the fortress shouted with a youthful voice unsuited for his appearance before leaping into the rear of the weakened Civil Militia of Trowyn. When the almighty Devil entered the fray, a catastrophe unfolded in the rear which was composed of only healers, magicians with non-combat specialties, and the injured with the exception of the small amount of guards stationed at the entrance. The support units and the injured were helplessly torn apart by the Devil's claws as there were only a handful of guards to defend them. The small number of magicians that were present there attempted to fight Elijah with their pitiful combat magic, but it only served to anger him further.

“Our Master has fallen!”

“Our family has been ruined!”

Around the corpses of the magicians that were pitifully torn apart, the Homunculi were busy making a fuss. On the other side, the news of Elijah's appearance reached the ears of Martin who was on the cusp of victory.

“What? That guy left the fortress?”

Martin's eyes trembled visibly, but he didn't feel as much shock as he did before. He calmly spoke.

“I'll go. Pull a portion of the veteran soldiers to stop that guy.”

“There is word that Sir Dargott is already heading toward that direction.”

“Parlim is? No, don't send him. Send a message to have him immediately turn around.”

At that moment, a blood-curdling roar like one of a lion's was heard from ahead and a single knight charged as he headed in this

direction. Martin could recognize that face even from a distance. It was the Knight-Captain of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights, Sungtek Cho.

It was the final throes of one of the most powerful man of this era now etched with the brand of the Devils. Martin personally swung his blade to face him.

‘Clang!’

Sword met sword. Sungtek’s eyes were filled with deep-seated grudge as he shot fiercely toward Martin’s face.

“Martin Breggas! You son a whore! Even if I die, I have to see you fall.”

“...”

“Koreans have a saying. I’ll take you down with me.”

“Sorry, but I have no intention of dying here.”

A fierce battle took place between the Lord Marquis and the Knight-Captain of the Iron Blood Knights. Sungtek had a greater zeal for the fight, but the one with higher overall stats was Martin Breggas. The victor of the battle was soon declared after a few critical clashes.

“Kekeke...”

Sungtek leaked out a rumbling laughter before grabbing hold of where his right arm used to be with his left. Red blood poured out from where his limb was cut away.

“Rest in peace,” said Martin as he looked off into some faraway place before inflicting the final blow. The blade pierced Sungtek’s heart in a single breath and his body quivered once. Suddenly Sungtek’s left arm grabbed hold of the blade that had pierced his heart and pulled his torso toward Martin.

“Hey, Marquis.”

Sungtek spoke with blood pouring from his mouth. Martin only

looked at him with contempt and didn't respond.

“Look behind you.”

Sungtek smirked before dropping his gaze and muttering under a hushed voice.

“Experience it for yourself, what it's like to lose a beloved child of yours...”

Sungtek stopped breathing.

Martin who was caught in an ominous premonition peeled Sungtek's corpse from his blade and immediately turned around. He saw. His son, Parlim Dargott, was grabbed by his other son, Elijah Breggas, and torn in half.

“Noooo!!”

Sungchul let out a sigh as he heard the desolate scream that could be heard in the distance.

‘No better example of karma.’

Martin Breggas was done for. When one's spirit falls, the body is soon to follow. It was unlikely that he would ever stand again.

“Bertelgia.”

Sungchul called out to her. Bertelgia who was hurriedly printing her drawing paused her work and answered him.

“Yea?”

“How much longer do you think it'll take?”

“About 10 minutes?”

“Sounds good. Keep at it.”

“What are you planning?”

“I'm going to go down there for a bit.”

The traitor who had taken the identity of Minamoto was now attacking Elijah. The one who had turned himself into a High Devil

was not to be a target of empathy, but Sungchul was still concerned about the corpse of the pitiful woman hanging on his back. He also had another objective.

‘Taeksu. He foolishly showed himself to me once again.’

Sungchul descended the mountain slope while recalling the faces of his comrades who had died by the hands of the traitor. He appeared like a force of nature when seen from a distance.

Chapter 108 – Debt of Punishment (2)

“Puhahahaha! Is this it? Devil!”

Minamoto’s combat prowess went beyond the rumors. He was not only holding his own against a High Devil known to be as powerful as a Transcendent but even pushing him back.

“Ow! It hurts! Stop it!”

Elijah was being pushed back one-sidedly despite wielding the power of a High Devil. There were largely two reasons for this.

First was the difference in skill. As a seasoned fighter, Minamoto had seen through Elijah’s powerful yet simple attack pattern and negated every move he was making by keeping one step ahead; the follow-up counter-attack that came after was just a bonus. Another reason was simply that Minamoto was powerful. He had used just one arm to block the heavy swing of Elijah’s clawed attack.

Elijah flailed about desperately with all his effort, but Minamoto did not retreat a single step. Instead, he was scolding the Devil by shaking a single finger side to side.

“I am unbreakable. This sort of attack does not work on me.”

It was an unbelievable sight, for a mere admiral of the Human Empire’s Fleet who did not even manage to enter the lowest seat of the 13 Champions of the Continent to display such strength. Minamoto was performing a feat that was believed to be impossible with the exception of the Emperor of the Human Empire, Aquiroa the Executor, and Shamal Rajput, the head of the Assassin’s Guild. The soldiers who were watching the spectacle broke out into a cheer.

“My god... to stand toe to toe with a High Devil in terms of strength, Admiral Minamoto; he’s amazing.”

“Is this the strength of the man who was promoted by the

Emperor because of his combat prowess?”

“It looks like the rumors that even the Enemy of the World was wary and envious of his skill wasn’t just hot air.”

Minamoto did not outwardly appear to be reacting to the sound of praise coming from behind him, but he was burning with passion on the inside.

‘Kekeke... more. Praise me more. Sing of my praises a bit louder!’

To the Summoned, the mass summoning was a tragedy on its own, but to some, it was a gift. This was especially true for people like Taeksu Kim or Minamoto Daisuke who had no outlook in life. Minamoto was subjected to [izime](#) before the word izime was adopted to Korean, and he had been a shut-in recluse long before the word [hikikomori](#) was coined. The Other World was like heaven that overflowed with milk and honey. Anyone could obtain overwhelming power through a bit of luck, regardless of the actual effort involved.

A smile formed on Minamoto’s lips. He was assured of victory.

‘This Devil. He’s weaker than me. I might not have been able to beat him before, but the Forbidden Technique sure is great!’

He allowed the sinister energy he had obtained via betrayal to run rampant inside of his body. The destructive power that he himself had no means to restrain filled every cell of his being.

“I am a High Devil! How dare a mere human stand against a High Devil! This doesn’t make any sense! Why do you think I have become a High Devil!”

Elijah began to reek of vile Demon Aura as he rushed forth. It was a charge that held enough power and speed to make even the most grizzled knights, who often boasted about having being trained in the battlefield, reel back in fear.

However, Minamoto evaded Elijah’s charge with light movements like that of a bullfighter. He recalled one of the scenes

from pro wrestling that he saw at a young age as he dodged. The most popular figure on that show broadcasted by the American military: the muscled man in the yellow underwear. As an apostle of justice, the patterns of his matches were all the same. His repertoire was to be beaten up by the evil [heel](#) until he was awoken by the cheer of the crowd to some monstrous strength that allowed him to overwhelm his villain in a single move. It was simple but always evoked a thunderous applause.

A cruel smile formed on Minamoto's lips.

‘I'll strike back hard after playing with you for a little bit.’

He was planning on using this opportunity to show his true worth to not only the members of his fleet but also to the soldiers of the front lines of the Demon world, and correct his recently declining evaluation.

‘13 Champions of the Continent? Don't make me laugh. The fact that I'm not on that list means that the list is worthless!’

He delayed the fight as he continued to block or barely evade Elijah's relentless assault. Until the moment when people began to chant his name.

As Elijah began to gather his breath and prepare for his next attack, the cheer of the crowd fell into Minamoto's ears.

“Human! You must get up!”

“You must defeat that demon!”

The words of cheer that he had been waiting for had arrived. Minamoto smiled as he recalled the man in yellow underwear that stood on the post of the ring in the crowd's adoration.

“Now! You must get up!”

However, the voices were strange. Minamoto quickly looked around him.

‘Huh? It's just Homunculi all over?!’

There was a crowd of homunculi. Each one of them had a hideous appearance as their limbs were torn off, clothes ripped away, or their hair singed off. They looked to be the group of homunculi that were used by the Mages who had met their ends in the hands of Elijah Breggas when he ran rampant here.

The cheer of the homunculi grew more intense as Minamoto turned to look at them.

“You must get up! Stand up and get rid of the evil Devil!”

It was then that Elijah headed toward him with the sound of metallic chains clanking. Minamoto did not hold it any longer. He put his strength behind the hand that held Yodo Kamaitachi and sliced through the High Devil rushing toward him with a single swing. It appeared as though a fog of blood had sprayed around Kamaitachi like a sprinkler before Elijah was felled like a giant tree.

“I-it can’t be true... I-I am a High Devil...”

Elijah wasn’t quite dead yet. He had just received a mortal blow that kept him on the floor; gasping for breath. The metal chain wrapped around his back had also been cut, freeing the corpse of the female which slid to the floor. A cheer broke out.

This time it was not just the homunculi, but also the soldiers in the rear, but Minamoto could only hear the loud and annoying sound of the Homunculi cheering. He walked toward the Homunculi with heavy steps.

“We’re really grateful!”

“Admiral Minamoto is our hero!”

The Homunculi put on a grotesque smile as they praised him. Minamoto suddenly lifted one up before throwing it back toward the floor.

‘Pik!’

The Homunculus was smashed onto the floor turning into a bloody mess.

“To receive praise from these half-made trashes. I can’t bear it! I won’t let anyone who was watching live!”

Yodo Kamaitachi danced once again. The homunculi’s heads and limbs flew dizzyingly in the air as bright red blood splattered in every direction. No one could stop him who was dyed in madness. His blade that had soaked his immediate surroundings in blood swung violently in the air seeking its next opponent. Elijah Breggas became its next target as the closest being around.

“I received this humiliation because of this trash-like Devil.”

However, Elijah’s movements were strange. The High Devil who had been gasping for breath after the mortal blow was now stretching his hand in an attempt to reach something.

Minamoto’s eyes moved and soon discovered what he sought. There was a corpse of a young woman tied in metal chains in the direction of the High Devil’s outstretched hand.

“S...sophia...”

Minamoto’s face grew ugly.

“Is the so-called High Devil playing with a human corpse like a doll? Not only are you weak and repulsive, you are also perverted.”

Yodo Kamaitachi’s tip was pointed toward Sophia’s corpse.

“I will slice up this rotten corpse and feed it to the dogs!”

The blade exploded into a fog of blood and split the air. Just when the sword dyed in an evil aura was about to touch the corpse,

‘Clank.’

something stopped the blade. Minamoto’s eyes grew wide.

‘W-what is this?!’

The number of people that could stop him weren’t many. The

only ones he expected to be able to block his attack with such ease were the higher ranked Devil Lords, and those with the title of 'Transcendent' within the human alliance. But the face that stood before him was someone he could have never expected.

'K-kim Sungchul?!'

He had not been told that Sungchul was here. His panic-stricken face turned toward the distant Martin Breggas. Martin, who was now kneeling over his son's torn corpse with a distant expression on his face, was lost in many ways.

The man who had stopped the sword smirked while Minamoto still stood in shock.

"Yo, Taeksu Kim."

"E-enemy of the World!"

The atmosphere of the entire battlefield shifted with the presence of a single person. The fleet of the Human Empire who had been carpet bombing, the Civil Militia of Trowyn who had been sweeping up the remnants of the enemy army, the main forces on the ground, and even the Order of the Iron Blood Knights who had been surrounded and waiting for death were wholly focused on the appearance of this one man.

Silence that couldn't have been imagined moments ago fell onto the battlefield. Minamoto pulled away his Yodo Kamaitachi from Fal Garaz that stood in its path and retreated.

"It's been a while."

Sungchul spoke with a bright smile. His smile picked away at a scar deep inside Minamoto... no, Taeksu's mind. 15 years ago on the plains of La Grange, the humiliation of the time when he had been helplessly tied up without being able to do anything despite being much stronger than Sungchul appeared in his mind.

'It's different now. My strength has grown since then, and I have techniques and experience that I didn't possess back then.'

Despite the fact that Sungchul's infamy had swept across the world, Minamoto, with his sinister secret, believed that Sungchul's reputation was nothing but hogwash.

'I'll kill you and place my name as the First Champion of the 13 Champions of the Continent. No, wouldn't First Champion be too much? Since the one who gave me power is also on the list.'

Minamoto smirked. He had become panicked momentarily, but courage stemming from self-confidence quickly sprang forth.

"Yodo Kamaitachi, Blood Fiend Technique! You're a dead man!"

Minamoto stood boldly before Sungchul and swung his katana. A fog of blood quickly began to spread from the blade's body. It was the same blade that had cleaved through Elijah in a single slice.

However, Sungchul only looked at Minamoto with apathetic eyes.

Minamoto slowly began to move. It was at this moment that a voice of a young girl rang out from above Sungchul's head.

"All done!"

A single book was gliding straight toward Sungchul's head from the sharp mountain slope. Sungchul collected the falling book.

"I told you to wait."

"It was scary waiting by myself!"

He smiled bitterly as to say "It can't be helped" and pulled out the single drawing held between the pages of the book. It contained the image of a beautiful woman.

Minamoto's face grew red.

'Why... that's my ideal woman!'

Sungchul pulled out the drawing, indifferent whether Minamoto looked or not, and placed it onto another portrait. The final drawing turned into fragments of light and disappeared leaving

behind a single message in Sunghcul's eyes.

[How was it? It couldn't be that you've fallen for me now, right? It doesn't matter if you did. We can never be.]

Basic Reward:

1. Intuition +1

2. Portrait of Vestiare drawn on Jewel Papyrus

Sungchul immediately threw the portrait of Vestiare drawn on Jewel Papyrus onto the ground without hesitation. Minamoto ran over to the ground to pick up the portrait as quick as lightning.

“Oooh...! Sugoi!”

Sungchul checked his changed stats while Minamoto was preoccupied with the portrait.

Intuition – 500

A smile rose on Sunghcul's lips, then...

‘Bam!’

A fearsome strike that couldn't be seen struck Minamoto's abdomen.

“Degayasu!”

Minamoto let out an eerie scream and collapsed onto the floor. Sungchul took a sweep at the gazes of the soldiers filled with awe and fear before heading off. Martin had become a shell of a man, and Minamoto was dead. There was no one left to stop his path.

While he was thinking so, Minamoto's body which lay on the ground began to squirm.

“Go... no further! Sungchul!”

Sungchul could now see it. The evil energy that surrounded Minamoto's entire body. This thing that could be described as a black fog, or maybe mucus, was now popping Minamoto onto his feet.

“...”

He watched Minamoto who was now heading in his direction with a katana in hand with callous indifference.

Izime - Japanese word describing a group picking on one person.
A ‘group vs individual’ bullying.

Hikikomori – Reclusive adolescents or adults who withdraw from social life, often seeking extreme degrees of isolation and confinement.

heel - In professional wrestling, a heel is a wrestler who is villainous or a “bad guy”, who is booked (scripted) to be in the position of being an antagonist.

Chapter 109 – Debt of Punishment (3)

It was a skill that Sungchul did not recognize. One thing that Sungchul could see was that the strength that had delayed Sungtek's death and held him up was not one of his own but from an external source. Sungchul thought of a possibility.

‘Is it a Soul Contract?’

A Soul Contract is, as the name indicates, a blessing created by a God or a Lesser God which is then etched into the user's soul. The blessings were frequently difficult to obtain, but when obtained, it would grant the user a great power. The Eye of Truth and Soul Storage which were commonly used were also power granted by Soul Contracts.

Souls often possessed metaphysical properties which were known to be impossible to understand through human understanding, but at least in the realm of Soul Contracts, a difference in the size of souls existed. This was the number of contracts a person can hold.

Empty regions where a contract can be held in the soul were known as Slots. The average person would only have a single slot, if at all. The higher the stats and the higher the number of lives one has influence over, the more the number of slots become available. Those extraordinary ones commonly referred to as Superhuman held 3 slots. The Transcendents were known to hold between 4 to 5 slots. However, Sungchul held 6 lots.

Every one of the Soul Contracts was a precious thing that was difficult to obtain and only found through the harshest of trials. Among them, these three were the most important.

First, Soul Harvester. A legend tier Soul Contract that restores one's vitality by the amount of damage inflicted. It was due to this ability that restored his strength after he killed his enemies that allowed him to become the immortal figure when standing against

armies.

Second, Thunder Shield. Another legend tier Soul Contract that had the fearsome effect of reducing all magical damage by half and also granted immunity to all mental attacks below legend rank. Seeing as the only beings capable of utilizing mental attacks above legend rank were god-level beings, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that there was no person in the world capable of harming Sungchul through a mental attack.

Third, Eye of Truth. It was the most commonly used legend tier Soul Contract that negated all illusory magic below epic rank, and it also allowed him to inspect all items, cursed items, and skills. It couldn't be more emphasized how necessary this skill was for Sungchul who had made the vast majority of the world his enemy.

It was to acquire these three Soul Contracts that Sungchul had traversed the world discreetly having to pass trials with his life, and sometimes his soul, at stake. He had to overcome mortal risk many times and met face to face with horrendous pain and despair which cannot be fully put into words. It was only after such trials that he was able to gather the Soul Contracts known as the 3 Divine Skills and etch it into his own soul.

The change that was happening to Minamoto's body seemed to be due to some form of a powerful Soul Contract, although it wasn't at the level of Sungchul's.

“Kekeke... Strong. For just a fucking highschool graduate piece of shit...”

‘Crrrik crack.’

The sound of his broken spine assembling itself could be heard. Sungchul looked into Minamoto's eyes. His body was being repaired, but his mind was wandering some otherworldly place. Minamoto was gasping for breath while uttering something akin to talking in his sleep.

“What? Enemy of the World? Some overhyped bitch... I know what you were before you came here. Some fucking uneducated laborer whose only accomplishment in life is being 14 days late out of service because you were rotting in some prison? Not just you, but that Emperor William Quinton Marlboro. I even know that he’s some whore’s son.”

Minamoto began to snicker to himself as though it was something hilarious.

“For the son of some prostitute working on the pole at some strip bar to be Emperor! Ehehehe! They say there’s nothing like the seed of royalty, but this isn’t proper, is it?”

“...”

Sungchul didn’t say anything to this. It was because Minamoto’s rant was not too far from the truth. He could still remember it. It was on some festive autumn night with a bright full moon. The Summoned who have been brought into Other World had a solemn moment by the crackling fireside where they talked about their previous lives. The man who became an Emperor, the man who became an assassin, and those who have been killed or have returned to their own world were looking off at some distant place with longing eyes as they told their stories. Taeksu might have been there although Sungchul didn’t recall whether Taeksu had been there or not.

Taeksu had been an inconspicuous person at the time without the courage to speak nor the talent to stand out. However, Sungchul had a single question for Minamoto now that it had reached this point.

“Why did the Emperor bring you in?”

On the surface, it might be easy enough to say that Taeksu was another Summoned with powerful combat potential which had swayed the Emperor. Sungchul had also believed those words at the time. No, he just didn’t suspect them.

When he was the Emperor's sword, it had never even occurred to him that it was possible to doubt the Emperor. But, he could now ask those questions.

"I'll ask again. Why did the Emperor bring you in?"

"Don't you already know?"

Minamoto smirked as he put on a little dance.

"I know something you don't. A truth that that arrogant Emperor will never tell the likes of you."

"Is that right?"

"Yep. Of course, I have no obligation to tell you anything. But since we've known each other for so long, I'll let you in on something fun."

Minamoto put on a smug smile before whispering to Sungchul in his silence.

"The Wandering King had the military power to beat you all in that fight."

"The Wandering King did?"

"Yep. The proof is me. The Great Minamoto Daisuke who has been reborn through the Forbidden Technique. Kekeke!"

An evil aura poured out from Minamoto's eyes. It was the same presence that had rose him from the dead.

Sungchul dug through his past experiences for something similar to this evil aura, but he found no such luck. The closest thing to this aura was the damp and stick aura of the Ancient God.

"Yodo Kamaitachi!"

Minamoto who was swallowed by the evil aura began to exude a blood-colored fog as he headed toward Sungchul with the appearance of the Demon Yasha.

"I am Unbreakable... Unbre...!"

However, the difference in strength between the two was clear. Minamoto's figure scattered like dust as soon as Fal Garaz moved.

“Unbreeeee...!!!”

It was the result of putting some strength behind the swing. The Soul Contract or whatever it may be tried to grab on the Minamoto's scattered flesh, but it eventually scattered with them.

‘I don't care about your secret.’

He was already sick of these dirty schemes. No matter what any had planned, It was enough to crush them with Fal Garaz. He had obtained this godly strength for this purpose.

“...”

Sungchul turned his head to one side and saw Elijah Breggas who was still gulping for breath as he lay on his side. Sungchul then turned toward the other side. Martin Breggas who looked to have been hollowed out was kneeling there. Sungchul picked up the female corpse that laid between the two, which was slightly closer to Elijah's side.

A long time had passed since she had died, but Sophia Breggas' appearance looked unchanged from when she lived. He went through the numerous carefully placed magic on Sophia's body with the Eye of Truth.

“W-where is this?”

Elijah spoke.

“I can't see anything. It hurts... It's cold...”

His life was hanging by a thread. It was Minamoto's handiwork. Minamoto had made it so that the Devil would die in pain and despair as slowly as possible.

Sungchul left Elijah and moved on. He could hear Elijah's voice from behind him.

“Father... Where are you?”

Elijah's extended hand desperately sought out his father who no longer existed. Martin, who was the source of all this trouble, had lost his life at some point and was quickly growing cold. It was a senseless and pitiful end for the fortuitous adventurer who had risen to the rank of the Sixth Champion of the Continent.

Sungchul abruptly walked forth with Sophia's corpse in hand. There were thousands of soldiers on the battlefield, but no one could think to follow behind him.

—

A stone grave was crudely made on top of a sunny hill. Bertelgia had brought a white flower from some place in between her pages and offered it to the grave as she said,

“To escape this cruel world into the embrace of a warm god!”

Sungchul read a book while leaning on a rock. It was the secret tome of Cosmomancy, Primordial Light, which he obtained through incredible effort in Airfruit. An endless horizon and incomprehensible shapes and words opened up before his eyes when he opened the book, and all of it began to organize itself in some recognizable form.

‘Is this the Primordial Light? It truly possesses a difficult and incomprehensible nature that's hard to describe.’

Intuition of 500 was not something anyone could achieve. Even in the greatest of Magical Academies, there might be one or two people that might ever reach this peak. It was at a level where they would easily receive the title of Great Scholar. This Intuition that Sungchul had achieved was now whispering to him the story of this world's secret that a human mind could never hope to understand. After a long and seemingly boring story which he was strangely captivated by, Sungchul sensed; the origin of life before him was filled with unfathomably endless light.

‘Is this... Primordial Light?’

In this blinding brilliance, Sungchul could feel some new strength budding inside his body.

[You have read through the Final Secret Tome of Cosmomancy ‘Primordial Light – Punishment’]

[You’re overflowing with the knowledge of the Skies and Cosmos.]

Reward: Magic “Star Light”

“What are you doing? Why aren’t you in silent prayer?”

Bertelgia had approached Sungchul’s back and began to peck him with one of her corners. In the past, this was something Bertelgia would never have dared to do, but as she drew Vestiare’s portrait, she had gained a bit more confidence and a higher position in Sungchul’s eyes. Sungchul grabbed the persistent Bertelgia and stuffed her into his pocket before looking toward the northern skies. The thick dark storm cloud that had always loomed over the Demonic Realm was projecting an eerie red lightning. Sungchul lifted his finger and pointed toward the northern sky. But then he instinctively sensed that his finger wouldn’t be enough.

‘It’s different than Glare.’

He had felt it to be uncomfortable even as he cast Meteor, and this was Primordial Light which was the greatest magic of Cosmomancy. Sungchul pulled out a single staff from his Soul Storage. It was an oak tree staff that looked worn as it had been passed through many hands. Sungchul looked at the staff for a while after grabbing it.

‘To be using this old thing.’

His apathetic eyes were suddenly filled with nostalgia.

“Sniff sniff!”

Bertelgia showed interest in this staff she had never seen before.

“It smells like a woman? Who’s is it”

“... None of your business.”

Sungchul stuffed her deep into his pocket before pointing the staff toward the northern sky. A complex magical formation appeared around the staff and him. A decently long aria, though shorter than Meteor; Sungchul thought as such when the invocation that filled his inner consciousness was spat out in his mind.

“Star Light.”

A magical formation brightly opened up at the end of the staff like a mechanical gear. At the same time, a massive pillar of light poured out from the end of the formation. A massive pillar of pure light that couldn't even be compared to the likes of Glare. The pillar split the air and struck the storm looming in the northern sky. When the pillar of light faded, a noticeable gap had formed in that storm cloud. It was the flight path of the greatest magic of Cosmomancy, Starlight.

Sungchul felt a joy that he hadn't felt in a long time within that empty feeling when half of his entire mana poured out.

‘I can do it with this!’

There was no need to test this out on the Deep Sea Demon. Primordial Light was the real deal, and it would be the best solution.

“Woah... that's your magic? I thought I was looking at one of the Seven Heroes' magic.”

It might have been because of the afterblast caused by Primordial Light. When the air that had been pushed out by the pillar of light flooded back, it came like a strong current that swallowed everything up.

“Eek!”

The moment Bertelgia let out her sharp scream, Sungchul grabbed the flower. He offered the flower to Sophia's grave and

secured it between the rocks before heading north. Toward the storm cloud that he had split in half.

Chapter 110 – Heading to the Demon Palace

(1)

“The Enemy of the World reappeared on the Demon Realm Frontlines.”

“The Enemy of the World one-sidedly killed Admiral Minamoto Daisuke of the Human Empire and disappeared with ease.”

“Lord Marquis Martin Breggas died suddenly, and now there is no one left to defend the Demon Realm Frontlines.”

Urgent messages of events unfolding within the Demon Realm Frontlines were spreading throughout the world. The news even reached the shoddy saloons of Trowyn. A sole adventurer who had been tipping mugs of beer into her mouth in a corner inside the saloon took off the rag around her head as if from frustration.

Her tidily organized hair and her brown eyes filled with soft but powerful resolution were revealed.

“...”

Sujin Lee. Her name had been spread as Ahmuge among the upper echelon of this world.

The saloon was rowdy with debates and disputes over the news regarding the Enemy of the World and the northern frontier. One thing that was certain was that the Enemy of the World, Sungchul Kim, had appeared for the second time. There was also another unconfirmed rumor that a beam of light, that appeared like the spear of god, had split the dark clouds looming in the north.

Ahmuge looked at her lightly shaking mug of beer with eyes filled with distrust.

“Why is this happening? The moment he was supposed to reveal himself again was right after the Army of Devils was repelled.”

She may not know much else, but one thing was for sure:

everything was becoming skewed. The future she had seen that is.

—

There were only a few that hadn't heard of the name Aquiroa the Executor. Known as one of three Transcendants as well as the Second Champion of the Continent, Aquiroa the Executor of the World Council was the lord of the mystical and veiled Floating Isles and hailed as a powerful mage hero who had lent her strength to the Emperor William Quinton Marlboro in toppling the evil Rutheginea Kingdom. However, it was rare for anyone to know what kind of person Aquiroa actually was. There was little else recorded about her other than the plain fact that she was old, originated from the Floating Isles, and that she was a powerful magician. Not a single thing about her actual age, her history during her formative years, nor her family situation was known.

Among the 13 Champions of the Continent who have each established themselves as powerful heroes, she was like a ghost made up of secrets. That Aquiroa was now entering a hallway veiled in darkness to enter a room filled with stillness.

It was a shabby room adorned with no windows nor any furniture other than a straw mat bed. There was a single man sitting on this bed. Aquiroa carefully opened her mouth in his direction.

“Your Majesty. It might be difficult to hold off any longer. Judging by his oppressive strength, he seemed to have already met with an existence one should never meet.”

Aquiroa bowed in the direction of the man sitting in the dark. Her humble bow was not for the Emperor of the Human Empire that ruled over this world, the king of the Ancient Kingdom that existed for over ten thousand years, nor the heads of Elves or Dwarves that held high pride. There was but one person. It was none other than the crownless king, the Third Champion of the Continent, who was commonly known as the Wandering King.

“... is that so?”

He used to go by another name in the past; The Neglectful King, Kromgard. He was the final ruler of the Holy Kingdom of Rutheginea that had reigned over the majority of the continent before the Human Empire. He had been praised as a genius magician of a rare kind as a possessor of three magical fingerprints and a swordsman of unending potential as a child, but he lost interest in all things at some point and shut himself away in his room; focusing all of his attention on creating locks.

Nobles began to exercise acts of exploitation and oppression to sate their greed as he turned away from governing which ignited the embers of rebellion across the land. A single man led the rebel army. The Summoned known as William Quinton Marlboro.

The rebel army boldly bypassed countless fortifications and positions and forced their way right up to the vicinity of the Kingdom's capital – La Grange. They had bet the fate of the continent on a single battle.

When faced with the final battle, King Kromgard surrendered and gave up the crown to the rebel army. It was an unexpected decision by the Neglectful King. He was exempt from responsibility and made a free man in return.

What he did after that day was not known, but other than receiving the title of the Third Champion of the Continent upon the assembly of the 13 Champions, he was known to wander the world by himself without kingdom or subjects. The world had given such a man the nickname of the Wandering King.

“...”

A helmet that couldn't be peered into. A massive armor that covered his entire body. A white undyed cloth mantle that had slightly yellowed. These were the symbols that now represented the Wandering King.

“There might be a need for me to step in personally.”

Aquiroa bowed her head toward the Wandering King once again. There was someone resembling a man standing behind her. The strange creature that was too transparent and lanky to be called human was standing half covered in darkness while silently blinking with its large and stretched out oval shaped eyes. There was something dark within its large eyes that was pulsating while exuding an uneasy aura.

The dark interior of the Wandering King’s helm flashed with interest.

“Is it finally complete? My true soldiers?”

His vision was focused on the monstrous figure standing behind her.

“I am ashamed, and it is with the deepest of regrets to inform you that we are still not at the final stage yet. However, they might be able to shackle a certain young man who has one-sidedly focused his growth on his physical stats.”

“A shackle...”

The face of a skinny young man tied in metal chains and shackles grazed past the Wandering King’s eyes, then the face of the woman who stood in front of the man in tears begging for his life bubbled up as well.

‘I should have killed the bastard then.’

However, the past was the past. Only God can tell how the wheel of fate would turn. The Wandering King broke away from his brief moment in thought and looked toward Aquiroa.

“... What will you do?”

“I will personally head toward the Demonic Realm. Leading the fleet under your majesty’s banner.”

He nodded at her resolute request.

“We need more time than expected. We must complete our objective before the Calamity that we can’t handle destroys everything.”

“I shall carry out thy will!”

The Wandering King melted into the darkness. Aquiroa turned around as well and headed forward in haste.

‘Sungchul Kim. I can’t let an idiot like you ruin our plans.’

A blue flame danced beneath the mask.

—

“....”

The Entrance of the Demon Realm.

A Deep Sea Demon was trembling in the fetal position behind Sungchul. Their intelligence was low, but whatever that had occurred here was enough to stamp fear into what little intelligence there was.

Sungchul left the Deep Sea Demon alone and headed deeper into the Demon Realm. There were dozens of airships floating at the end of the passageway which was the entrance of the Demon Realm. It was the fleet of the Human Empire.

“Enemy of the World! You shall not pass.”

Below them were the last scraps of soldiers left on the Demon Realm Frontlines who had formed a ground force from a hodgepodge of different races.

“Return Fal Garaz! You thieving rat!”

Several of the dwarves began to spit out profanities in bellowing voices. This was the reply the World gave as Sungchul decided to stand against the Calamities.

Sungchul looked over at these people that stood before him with disinterest.

“Phew. Don’t they ever get tired of this?”

Bertelgia let out a sigh as though she had already grown accustomed to this scene. Sungchul, on the other hand, was in deep thought.

‘Strange. They managed to gather such a force after breaking through the Deep Sea Demon.’

However, there was no sign of battle around the previous Deep Sea Demon. There was not a single corpse to be found. Deep Sea Demons were nothing but rabid mutts before Sungchul, but they were usually not an enemy to be trifled with. They held the title of gatekeeper of the Demon Realm.

As one had crushed the Crusaders of Salvation, these Deep Sea Demons could pulverize any army with their massive physique, fearsome strength, and most of all, their unbelievable vitality. Their ability to bypass such a Deep Sea Demon with no casualties brought up a single possibility.

‘Did they collaborate with the Devils?’

It was completely within the possibility for the ruling elite. They would do anything for their benefit. Martin Breggas who had sacrificed the entirety of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights for the sake of making his son a hero was a prime example.

Sungchul wanted to put it to the test. He looked up at the airships in the sky. A large airship that was uniquely adorned with flashy decorations caught his eyes.

‘Is that their flagship?’

He checked the flag fluttering on top of the airship. The golden sun symbolizing the Human Empire with a hand grasping lightning was clearly on display on the fluttering flag. It belonged to Overseer Dmitri Medioff of the Human Empire.

‘I think his flagship was the Vanguard.’

The ship that Sungchul recalled was destroyed during the exchange with the Devils during the Airfruit fiasco. Currently, Dmitri was aboard the Androgoras; the new model of destroyers.

‘It’s fine either way.’

Sungchul had no ability to fly. However, he did know of a method to board a flying airship, and had the ability to put that plan into action.

‘Dmitri Medioff is my only target.’

Demonic Weapon Cassandra was pulled out of the Soul Storage after so long. Sungchul held Cassandra and rushed toward the ground forces that stood against him. Elven archers and Dwarven artillery shells poured down like rain.

Cassandra whipped about like a living snake toward the flying projectiles and destroyed them. Due to the unimaginable tensile force it had, it not only deflected everything it touched, but it also reduced them to dust. Sungchul approached 30 meters to the ground forces.

“Spears to the front!”

Dwarven spearmen lined their lengthy spears five times their height toward Sungchul.

‘Stomp’

Short but sturdy military boots kicked the ground to take root where they stood. However, none of the Dwarves believed that their defensive formation would have any effect on Sungchul. Their expectations turned to reality.

Sungchul grabbed the spears that were pointed toward him with his hand and used his strength to quickly leap over the Dwarven formation.

“How dare you!”

“Die!”

Human knights and swordsmen swung their swords and maces and leaped toward him. Sungchul gripped the collar of one of the knights wearing light armor to deflect the oncoming attacks before looking toward the sky. His eyes caught sight of something. It was the hot air balloon assigned to every airship.

In between battles, airships used this hot air balloons to exchange supplies and men with the ground forces. The airship itself could descend, but it would be risking dangers such as an ambush or sudden gusts of wind that might take down the ship. Because losing such expensive airships would be a heavy loss to the national treasury of the Human Empire, they decided to use these hot air balloons on each of the airships. One of these logistics hot air balloons was nearby.

‘Skkrrt!’

Demonic Weapon Cassandra wrapped around the rope hanging below one of them. As expressions of terror spread across the soldiers aboard the hot air balloon, the entire balloon shook and was slowly being dragged below.

Sungchul put strength behind the arm holding Cassandra and leaped on.

“Cut the rope! Immediately!”

However, a black figure had already boarded the balloon before anyone could finish the order. A forceful hand grabbed the soldiers on board and threw them below. The soldiers squirmed in the mud when they touched the ground. They wouldn’t have died even if it had been on hard ground. They were trained soldiers of the Human Empire.

Sungchul who had hijacked the balloon cut the rope connecting it to the ground and began to ascend. Countless arrows and ballista shots shot up from the ground aimed at Sungchul, but they couldn’t pierce through the curtain of might formed by Cassandra.

The news that Sungchul had boarded the balloon immediately spread to the airships. High-speed airships capable of much greater maneuverability opened their gunports and aimed toward the balloon Sungchul was riding.

“Fire!”

Several cannon shots fired together tore through the balloon and the torn balloon helplessly fell toward the ground, but Sungchul who had been aboard was nowhere to be found. Sungchul had already leaped toward the nearest airship once he had reached an appropriate height. His leap filled with god-like strength had placed him onto a certain airship’s deck.

“Boom!”

Monster of this era wielding Fal Garaz had boarded the ship. Everyone on board with the exception of the captain wearing a particularly tall hat wore the words terror across their face.

“...”

Sungchul briskly moved toward the bridge and uttered a single word.

“Scram.”

Roughly a dozen crew members jumped out of the bridge in a panic. Sungchul grabbed the key and turned the direction of the ship. His destination was the massive airship Androgoras that lied straight ahead.

Other airships were aware that Sungchul took over one of their ships and fired upon him, but it was already too late to stop him. Sungchul leaped off once he made it to an appropriate distance. It was a leap powerful enough to make the boat’s hull groan and buckle.

‘Boom!’

Rather than a bird, Sungchul flew like a meteor and landed on

the deck of Androgoras, and he looked at the man who was staring at him with eyes filled with terror to ask a simple question.

“Do you remember me, Dmitri Medioff?”

“W-who?”

Dmitri didn't recognize the face, but he immediately knew who Sungchul was when he noticed the hammer in Sungchul's hand.

‘Mommy...’

Note: Vagabond King has been renamed to Wandering King. In the last chapter Minamoto says to Sungchul ‘The Wandering King had the military power to beat you all in that fight.’ So the person here is the same who was with Aquiroa and Shamal in Chapter 98 where they were questioning Ahmuge.

The reason for this change is that Vagabond King made some readers think that he is the king of Vagabonds which is not what we intended it to mean. Hence, the change.

Chapter 111 – Heading to the Demon Palace

(2)

“S-stop him.”

Swordsmen of the Empire wearing flashy uniforms were rushing in to attack Sungchul with their shiny blades in hand. However, they were laid flat onto the deck when Cassandra split the air like a fly struck down by a fly swatter. Sungchul proceeded as he walked onto the bridge of the flagship Androgoras without interference.

Dimitri sought out escape routes, but it was more difficult to escape Sungchul than it was to take one's own life.

“Hey, Commander.”

Sungchul stood before him as though by fate. Sungchul didn't look happy nor upset, he instead inspected Dimitri with his indifferent eyes.

“Did you join hands with the Devil King?”

Sungchul asked bluntly. His question was extremely simple, but its simplicity was why it was to the point.

Dmitri's eyes trembled ceaselessly. He eventually organized his chaotic thoughts and began to speak.

“If... you're talking about a-alliances, that's not true. We only... out of immediate necessity...”

As he continued to stumble through his explanation, he felt something hard and cold touch his neck. It was Fal Garaz. The head of Fal Garaz had been brought to his neck.

“Briefly.”

Sungchul's intentions were clear. It was a threat against his life if he continued to speak nonsense. Sophistry: capital punishment. Long winded speeches: capital punishment. Twisting word games:

capital punishment. Just when Dimitri was prepared to work his silver tongue, he had become like a rat trapped in a corner.

“W-we came to an agreement.”

Dmitri swallowed deeply before he caved in and gave out the information.

“What kind of agreement?”

“T-to stop you from reaching the Devil King...”

“I see.”

Sungchul, who had heard all that he wanted to hear, lowered Fal Garaz and turned back. He didn't have any particular grievances with Dimitri anyways. The man that he had seen in Golden City was arrogant and was full of himself, but in reality, Dimitri was quite the loyal hunting dog for those elite few. He was nothing more and nothing less.

“What will you do now?”

Bertelgia brought up the question.

“I'll just walk the path I was walking before.”

He walked to the head of the ship. Dimitri who had just been brought back from the brink of death was rubbing his own neck while looking at Sungchul's back with a dumbfounded expression. Sungchul looked back as he arrived at the head of the ship and spoke in a clear voice.

“I'll kill you for real if you follow me.”

Dimitri recoiled back and kept nodding his head. It was at this moment when the mission of the five fleets of the Human Empire that had been deployed to the Demon Realm for the purpose of stopping Sungchul ended in failure.

—

Now, the only human remaining in the Demon Realm was

Sungchul. A colorful light of unknown origins lit up the dark skies beyond the endless wasteland in a mysterious light, and beyond the distant skies, some lonely screams could be heard spontaneously from time to time. A sulphuric stench clung to the tip of the nose like a shadow. That fading sulfuric stench indicated that they had entered into Demon Realm proper.

It meant that all of the one-sided ambushes he had experienced, and all those encounters that felt accidents would now become more organized. However, the divine items held in Sungchul's hand worked to repel the ambush from the Devil Army. The Devil Lord leading an army noticed Fal Garaz in Sungchul's hand and turned back to his castle as though his ass was on fire, shutting himself in.

Sungchul who was well versed in Devil psychology knew fully that the reason for their abrupt escape was partially due to their fear of him, but it was also to avoid taking too many losses and giving an advantage to rival demon armies. Devils were creatures of self-interest. If virtues like the likes of compassion and sympathy, respect and trust for others were to be purged from a human mind, it would leave something not too different from a demon's.

Storm clouds and Sulfur. The skies of the Demon Realm enveloped in fog had no separate night and day. Sungchul walked at a pace that wasn't too fast or too slow toward the Demon King's Palace. The reason for his reasonable pace was to prepare for any potential ambush. Even worms squirm when stepped on, and a rat trapped in a corner is bound to bite the cat.

Sungchul discovered something as he was walking the wasteland. There were bamboo-like objects sticking out of the dark earth like grass. There was so much of it that it wouldn't have been an exaggeration to call it a field of green.

However, grass doesn't grow on the surface of the Demon Realm with the exception between some rocks or underground caverns.

Sungchul pulled out the Demon Weapon Cassandra and powerfully struck a part of the tube. When the whip made contact, the air itself seemed to tense for a moment before a bright burst of light went off, followed by a powerful explosion. That single explosion might not have affected Sungchul in the least, but it wouldn't have been the case if the number of explosions grew. The green field that seemed to extend out to the horizon quickly disappeared in a chain of explosions. The dark earth turned bright like the day, and the world itself seemed to tremble for a few minutes.

“Uwah... There wouldn't be any piece left of me if I was standing there.”

Bertelgia spoke in a shocked voice.

“...”

Sungchul wouldn't have died, but Bertelgia might have been caught up in the explosion. He didn't utter that fact.

When the explosion subsided, Sungchul began to walk the changed landscape full of craters.

“Why are you trying to stand against the Calamity?”

Bertelgia suddenly asked in the midst of their walk. It was a topic that hadn't been discussed before as her goal had always been to lead Sungchul down the path of a Creationist, but now that they were finally drawing close to the elimination of the Demon King, she grew curious.

“Are you perhaps trying to be a hero? Trying to save the world like the Seven Heroes?”

Because Bertelgia was annoying Sungchul from the side, Sungchul replied in a calm manner.

“I'm not a hero.”

She tried to get a few more words in, but she couldn't.

Sungchul's eyes and face grew so different than before that he was now exuding a dangerous atmosphere. It wasn't until long after that Sungchul was no longer stiff. He looked toward the massive black rock mountain looming in the darkness. As he drew closer, the lower portion that was hidden by the horizon slowly revealed itself. The base of the mountain was carved out like the face of a Devil with two eyes and a mouth spewing red fire. It was the only Wonder carved into the drab and monotonous Demon Realm. Pandemonium. The Demon King resided here.

Sungchul spoke as he moved toward the Demon King's Palace.

"It is to unravel the Curse of Extinction."

"Hm?"

She tilted her head at the sudden response.

"Didn't you ask before? About the reason I'm facing off against the Calamity."

"Oh.. that? You didn't look happy about it... so I was just going to leave it be."

"I'm telling you so that you can keep it in mind."

Sungchul said as such before picking up his pace. His slow pace grew faster until he broke into a run. The scenery around him blew past quickly with the wind. However, the distant palace of the Demon King did not appear to be getting any closer. It was because of the massive distance between him and the palace.

The mountain in which the flaming face was carved into was simply that massive. Even if all the mountains of a nation were stacked on top of one another it still wouldn't match its size, and the flames that was spewed out intermittently reached the clouds. Each time it happened, the clouds fired a crimson lightning bolt and sprayed a shower of water towards the ground, but the gigantic flames devoured the water before it even hit the ground.

Sungchul entered that thirsty land upon which rain never

stopped. In front of him stood a mob of countless devils. It wasn't the opportunistic soldiers of the Devil Lords, but the army of the Demon King, Hesthnus Max.

“ ... ”

Sungchul looked toward them with indifference. Perhaps because he had already killed everyone with a reputation to their name in the previous expedition, there was no one here that appeared particularly strong.

‘I'll end this as quickly as possible.’

Sungchul made this promise to himself as he stepped forward. When that small, but significant step touched the ground, a magic formation appeared above the Devil forces. Sungchul quickly recognized that the extremely intricate magic formation was for a long distance teleportation spell. He also knew that this wasn't a magic technique of the Demons, but one from the humans. Beyond the magic formation, was an airship with an elegantly white body.

Sungchul's eyes twitched.

‘That's Procrustes. Isn't that Aquiroa's flagship?’

The Second Champion of the Continent Executor Aquiroa. The one responsible for turning the twelve champions away from the front of Pandemonium 8 years ago dared to show herself before Sungchul. A corner of Sungchul's eyes ignited with flames of rage.

‘You are the one person I want to kill no matter what.’

Sungchul recalled the face of a girl who had fallen asleep, who had become like a tree. Her always-soft and blushed skin became hardened like a bark of wood, and the surface was covered in white fungus as if covered in snow.

“Brazen.”

Sungchul spoke as though spitting the words from his lips. It was filled with emotion that couldn't be witnessed before. Bertelgia

could feel, from her pocket, that his heart was beating differently than it had before. The pure white airship came out of the magic formation and stopped over the head of the Demons. An old woman wearing a robe and a mask engraved with undecipherable letters stood above the airship.

“Sungchul! Don’t you know what kind of foolish thing you are attempting right now?!”

Aquiroa spoke like she was scolding a child.

“It’s still not too late. Stop this foolish task and return. If you do so, I’ll not only spare your life but also consider restoring your name.”

At that moment, the earth let out an earsplitting cry. Fal Garaz had struck its surface.

The Devils standing in formation fell into chaos before the unexpected quakes. One of the Devils pointed toward Sungchul’s direction.

“L-look over there!”

In the direction of that Devil’s finger was Sungchul holding a boulder that was the size of a house.

“...”

Sungchul lightly lifted that boulder and struck it in the air with Fal Garaz. That massive boulder flew like a baseball and critically struck the pure white airship.

‘Boom!’

The head of the ship began to tilt to the side with that single blow, and cracks began to form all over. Aquiroa who had been standing on the airship in high spirits began to waver from the blow.

“You dumb bastard! You haven’t changed since the past!”

Aquiroa raised her hand, and two strange human-like figures

appeared instantaneously behind her.

“Go! My soldiers! Restrain that foolish man from committing his foolish act!”

The two figures simply leaped down from the airship as is, and hurtled their bodies toward Sungchul. Sungchul watched the mysterious beings flying toward him.

‘What is that?’

They were existences that his collection of experiences and knowledge honed through countless battles didn’t recognize. However, there was no rule that he had to cut them any slack because he didn’t recognize them. Sungchul struck the ground with his hammer and caused countless rock fragments to fly over to the strange creatures. It might be considered a light attack, but with the god-like strength instilled within the rock fragments, they had the power to turn any living creature to rags. The fragments hit their mark, but something strange occurred as the fragments struck them. The fragments had simply pierced through their half-transparent bodies.

Sungchul’s eyes twitched.

‘Are they a type of Slime?’

Aquiroa who saw this scene began to snicker.

‘Kekeke... You were just some dumb worthless warrior. A failure who couldn’t walk the long tradition of combining sword and magic. You might have grown one aspect to an extraordinary degree, but how are you so unaware that your weakness is so glaring?’

The creatures that she had created possessed both malleability and durability that exceeded that of a Slime’s. Unless it was a particularly sharp sword of great value, it possessed perfect tolerance against blunt weapons that transmitted blunt force.

However, there had been one other who had the same line of

thinking; the demon ranked second among the devils of the Demon Realm, Kant Emile. He had discarded his flesh and became Slime in an attempt to stop Sungchul's attack. However, that level of wit was turned to dust before Sungchul's oppressive strength.

‘Wham!’

Sungchul knocked away the persistent enemies with his hammer. It wasn't even multiple hits. Just a single blow. In that single blow, the strange creatures literally exploded. The superior fluidity and regenerative power that it boasted had no meaning in front of Sungchul.

Aquiroa's body momentarily stiffened.

‘That doesn't make any sense...! It was able to endure a blow from a 700-strength level during testing...?!’

She was unaware of the true extent of Sungchul's power.

Sungchul who had eliminated the creatures lifted the boulder once again. The target was Aquiroa's flagship, Procrustes.

Aquiroa realized his intention and began to shout with her arms waving in the air in a panic.

“Sungchul! I have something to say! It's very important.”

“What could you possibly have to say now?”

Sungchul made the boulder fly with Fal Garaz. The pure white airship began to shake visibly as it groaned, and one of its masts fell away as it broke.

Aquiroa spoke again up on the chaotic deck.

“I know why you're disappointed. Aren't you disappointed because we chose to simply delay the Calamity?”

“You know very well.”

“We weren't trying to delay it! We were preparing another method!”

“Why are you telling me this now?”

“Because you were a nobody back then. Truthfully, weren’t you at the point where you wouldn’t have even gotten into the 13 Champions of the Continent if not for the Emperor’s backing? We didn’t want to share this information with someone like that!”

“Are you saying that you have a method now?”

Sungchul shot a cynical gaze toward Aquiroa. She felt revulsion shooting up from the tip of her toes as she nodded.

“Speak. Of that method.”

Sungchul spoke bluntly.

“I can’t say.”

“Oh, really?”

Sungchul put on a bitter smile as he lowered his hammer. Aquiroa who noticed this mustered up the courage to speak again.

“And we will need a bit more time.”

It was a slip of the tongue. Something that shouldn’t have been said. Sungchul’s eyes spat out rays of hostility that caused goosebumps. Aquiroa visibly stumbled as she tried to recoup her mistake.

“Wait! It’s just a little bit longer. It’ll be complete in just a little more time. All we need now is time. Time!”

“Do you truly believe that you can delay the Calamity? Even if it could be delayed, how much more sacrifice can you justify? Until everyone except you lot is killed?”

Aquiroa could determine that negotiations had drawn to a close by Sungchul’s calm expression. She began to wave her two fists like mad as she screamed with her grating voice.

“Why do you go that far! Sungchul Kim!”

“...”

“That child you’re trying to save isn’t even of your blood!”

Sungchul who had heard this lowered his head to look into his pocket and spoke calmly.

“Bertelgia.”

“Yea?”

“Go into the Storage for a bit.”

When Bertelgia hesitated, Sungchul spoke in an uncharacteristically soft and gentle manner.

“It won’t take that long.”

Chapter 112 – Hesthnius Max (1)

‘Boom! Boom!’

The Earth became like artillery shells bombarding the hull of the airship in white. The beautiful body of the vessel that had been held in great admiration was now trembling and tilting under this merciless barrage.

“Hurry up and initiate Teleportation! Hurry!”

The Dimensional Magicians who gathered in a circular formation at the center of the airship began the incantations, but a large-scale teleportation was no easy feat. The rocks shook the airship aggressively as the outline of the magic formation was drawn, and the magicians had to stop their aria every time.

‘Boom! Boom!’

Two consecutive rocks critically struck the stern of the ship. The body of the ship that had already begun to tilt finally lost its balance and began to fall. The deck of the ship that had been made using marble began to crumble like dominoes, and the people on top of the deck were swept away as the riggings hung below the mast became terrifying murder weapons assaulting them.

Aquiroa who sat at the front of the sinking airship did not move in the slightest; only staring intently at Sungchul who was pouring attack after attack toward her.

‘A worthless Summoned like yourself dares...’

None of it had felt quite real yet. The reality that that human with no background was causing her to suffer so.

“Miss Aquiroa! We must retreat. The ship is falling!”

The captain came up behind her and spoke desperately. Aquiroa finally managed to snap back to her senses and nodded before turning back.

Chaos was unfolding upon the deck. What had struck Aquiroa the deepest was the final moments of the Dimensional Magicians. The Dimensional magicians who had gathered in a circle to chant their aria were killed as they were strung up like marionettes on the riggings that had turned deadly.

‘It looks like it’ll be difficult to salvage the ship. Since it’s come to this, I need to secure my own escape.’

She instantly teleported following a short aria. Being adept in magic, she immediately began casting another aria after her instantaneous movement, and she appeared as if she was walking in mid-air. There was no way that Sungchul would leave her to finish her plans. He predicted her actions and fired off a rock.

“Cheeky!”

Aquira pulled out two staves and began to swing them violently. When she did, a powerful explosion burst out before her causing the flying rock to be obliterated into pieces. Thin fragments were flying around her vicinity, but the magic barrier that had been cast around her protected her from them.

Sungchul did not rush. He put down the rock in his hand and began to walk toward her direction. The slow walk turned into a run, and the run soon turned into a full-on sprint. He who had become a gust of wind pierced through thousands of Devils and ran toward the direction she was fleeing.

Aquira felt a chill from the back of her head and soon discovered that Sungchul was hot on her heels.

“This monster!”

Two different magic were cast from each staff. One staff formed an ice wall to block Sungchul’s path, and the other borrowed the energy from the abundant power of lightning in her surroundings to strike down the target.

‘Boom! Crack!’

Following a flash of light, a single strand of lightning flew toward Sungchul's direction. Sungchul lifted Fal Garaz as the lightning was about to strike him. The hammer forged from fragments of the sky absorbed the lightning and struck the ice wall in its path. A sound greater than thunder resounded before the ice wall was shattered to pieces, and Sungchul stepped through it like a leaping beast.

Aquiroa turned pale and quickly tried to formulate her next plan, but Sungchul's hand had already gripped onto her collar.

"You've always looked down on me."

"A-a mere Summoned..."

"Now it's my turn to look down on you."

Grasping her by the collar Sungchul threw her to the ground.

"F-fly!"

Aquiroa tried to form magic wings onto her back in order to resist, but the momentum building into her body was not something a rushed magic could dare withstand. She flew toward the place where the Devils were gathered like a comet and spun a bit like a wheel before coming to a stop.

"U-ugh..."

A portion of her mask broke, and between the shattered pieces revealed a stubborn red pupil.

Sungchul sat beside her like an angel of death.

"Is this all?"

He subtly taunted her. Aquiroa gritted her teeth and poured every magic she knew toward Sungchul, but none of it managed to deal any significant damage to him. Sungchul only evaded her assault or smashed through it like a cat toying with its prey, negating all of her actions.

"Is this is all the almighty Executor capable of?"

Sungchul spoke without a single ragged breath nor damage to his clothing. His figure reflected in Aquiroa's eyes appeared to be a massive, insurmountable wall. The shadow of despair began to finally loom over the eye peeking through the shattered portion of her mask.

Sungchul slowly lifted Fal Garaz.

“Now, let's put an end to this boring villain act.”

“Wait! I still have something to say! I-I... am nothing more than a servant!”

“...”

“I am not really the one that has been planning all this. I am simply acting according to the orders of the King of Kromgard.”

“The Wandering King...?”

The image of the pallid and lethargic man suddenly appeared in Sungchul's mind. Sungchul had no ill will toward the man. In fact, most of the generals in the anti-Rutheginia rebellion army had more or less a favorable impression of him. No one could know for sure the amount of blood that would have been spilled if the Wandering King had not voluntarily relinquished his crown. Not only that, but Sungchul had also had his life spared by the order of the Wandering King.

It was true that in the past Sungchul had been given a more lenient punishment despite the fact that the one giving the sentence had only done so begrudgingly due to being annoyed with someone's persistent pleading.

“And nothing will change if you kill me anyways. Aquiroa is not an individual but many. There will be another Aquiroa to replace me from the Floating Archipelago. So, show a bit of mercy on this old woman.”

While Aquiroa continued to speak Sungchul lightly closed his eyes and appeared to be in thought. He then turned around.

“I will speak of this directly to the Wandering King.”

What Sungchul desired was very clear. Irrepressible anger and fear were revealed in Aquiroa’s eyes underneath her mask.

“Beat it.”

Sungchul left her where she stood and walked on. Aquira continued to hesitate until her eyes held unspeakable hostility. Magic formations began to appear all throughout her body.

‘How dare you utter those disrespectful words. I won’t let you live.’

She was invoking the most destructive magic known to her – Thunder Breaker. It was the final magic of the Seventh Circle in the School of Wind that no longer existed. Her effort to perform magic not belonging to her own Magical Fingerprint caused blue lines to streak across her unsightly face in geometric shapes. Artificial Magic Fingerprint. It was a long forgotten antiquated ancient technique, but all of Aquiroa’s actions were within Sungchul’s predictions.

“As expected, every hunting dog seems to act in the same way.”

Sungchul turned around while Aquiroa was completing her aria. He had seen Aquiroa’s Thunder Breaker in the past. Ironically, it had also been in front of the Castle of the Demon King. She had used the magic to display her might as the Second Champion of the Continent, but its current form after such a long time was simply full of weaknesses.

‘L-little more!’

Aquiroa’s exposed face glowed brightly with blue vein-like Magic Fingerprint, and her eyes which were full of magic formations flew wide open. Sungchul drew closer.

“Once you threaten to inform their owners that they’ve shat on the ground, they always seem to react like this.”

“W-wait!” Aquiroa hurriedly tried to say something, but Sungchul was beyond forgiveness.

‘Wham!’

Fal Garaz slammed down onto the Executor that was now glowing brilliantly with magic. Her corpse was squashed with her body still wrapped around by magic formations.

“I’m a much scarier man than your master.”

He glared with an apathetic look at the corpse that was disfigured beyond recognition and let out a shallow sigh. A dark aura spread upwards from the corpse, and it forced Aquiroa, who had been turned to rags, to her feet. However, as her upper body had been reduced to a puddle of blood it could not be reborn, so this unknown dark aura could only maintain her clothing to the state it was when she was alive before flying away into the sky.

Sungchul could feel that this aura was similar to the one that Minamoto was reeking of.

‘Is it some different kind of strength than a Soul Contract?’

Unfortunately, this wasn’t the most urgent issue. Sungchul turned his head to look at the Royal Palace of the Demon King. There was an immeasurable amount of Devils guarding the front. He proceeded as he headed out alone.

The Devils let out a furious roar as they poured onto him like a tidal wave. Sungchul silently marched forth leaving behind mountains of corpses and rivers of blood in his way. Any Devil worth mentioning was steadily killed as he continued while the other Devils were now at the point where they turned tail to escape in a panic.

All that now stood in his path was the front gate of the Demon King’s Palace that had the form of a fearsome Devil. He had no key, and it didn’t appear like it would be opened for him, but the answer was somewhere nearby. The heavy steel gate was broken

open.

The blood colored rug laid out between the colonnade carved directly from the rock wall wrapped in darkness continued on into the darkness. Sungchul silently walked forward.

The Devils continued to ambush him from between the pillars. A Devil that spat poison. A Devil that poured out curses. The types of Devils were diverse, but the results were the same. Every time the assassins leaped in, Sungchul's hammer caused more casualties.

Soon the end of the carpet came to view.

At the end of the dull but decadent space with purple colored flames burning in lamps was a gigantic throne.

A massive corpse that was very familiar to Sungchul was sitting in a proud posture on the throne. It didn't look much different since his death. Sungchul could see that several smaller minor Devils were busy scurrying about performing a form of embalming process around the corpse of the Demon King. The King of the Demons was watching its own corpse being embalmed in a pale form beside it.

"You've come for me again. Not only once, but twice. Well, should we say three times in total to be technical? It's not only surprising, but it's also almost endearing."

Demon King Hesthnius Max didn't appear all that surprised at seeing Sungchul here. Instead, he had a relatively leisurely smile as though he was greeting an old friend with both arms open to meet him.

"Have you familiarized yourself with some magic? Even if you were some genius in magic, isn't it too brash to come so soon before even a year had passed? It's not like you're coming here to show off your strength."

Hesthnius' voice and pale face showed confidence. Confidence that was rooted in his assurance that Sungchul would never be able

to harm him.

“But, you’re still quite a foolish human. You would stubbornly choose to rush in by yourself in order to resolve the Calamity despite all the hate you receive from the other humans. I am currently studying the recent colloquial speech of humans, and I have coincidentally learned the word ‘subsisting’, and your face came to mind.

“...”

Sungchul did not respond. Instead, he pulled out a single scroll. It was the Harmeggedon scroll he had received from Vestiare. Hesthuniu’s eyes grew wide.

“T-that is...?!”

A powerful magician at the caliber of Hesthuniu could recognize such a powerful spell at first glance. The destructive aura that eerily flowed around the unsettling scroll made the Demon King’s eyes dizzy.

‘Seventh Circle... No, is it a scroll containing an Eighth Circle spell? Where did he... This shouldn’t be possible with human techniques!’

All sign of leisure vanished from the Demon King’s face.

“Could it be... the Seven Heroes. Did those bastards coerce you with that?”

“How did you know that?” Sungchul spoke with a faint smile lingering on his lips.

“You can tell when one becomes a Calamity. Those bastards next in line are aching to be released in this world even a second faster. You know why?”

“...”

“It’s because we’re all tied together on a single string. According to the Divine Authority that is referred to as a Calamity, that is.”

Chapter 113 – Hesthnius Max (2)

Hesthnius said in an audibly pleasing tone while being wary of Sungchul's mood. As far as he could see, Sungchul didn't seem to have any intention to fight immediately. There was room for negotiation. The tactful Demon King continued to wag his silver tongue.

“However, it's a fool's errand to trust those Seven Heroes. An errand for true fools indeed. Do you know what their true objective is?”

“Fair reward.”

What Sungchul had said wasn't far from the few records that remained of those times long past. According to legend, the Seven Heroes sought out compensation after they saved the world from the Calamity, but the world that they saved did not grant them the prize they demanded. The Seven Heroes bitterly removed themselves from history. They vowed to get what they were owed.

The Demon King shook his head.

“Wrong. They only want one thing.”

And smirked as he continued.

“Death of all mankind, and the subsequent end of an era.”

“So drastic.”

“That's right. It is drastic. Especially compared to the good-natured Devils.”

The Demon King's hands waved rhythmically in the air like the baton of an orchestral conductor, and when he did so, an illusion of a man appeared between Sungchul and him.

It was a man veiled in a bandana who radiated a mystical aura while he carried a two-handed sword the size of a small boy. The Demon King spoke again.

“You might not know as it must have been about 20 years ago. There was another who challenged me by his lonesome. He was very powerful.”

Sungchul looked at the illusion created by the Demon King once again.

“At that time, I told him the same story that I’m telling you now. I told him what would happen once I died, and what kind of pitiful end would befall the fragile mortals.”

“And in the end?”

The Demon King’s story caught Sungchul’s interest, and the Devil King smirked as he continued his story.

“He simply returned right then and there. Why? Because I was speaking the truth.”

“Who is this man that you’re speaking of?”

As Sungchul continued to show interest, the Demon King smiled a smug smile in his heart as he hatched his scheme.

“I could reveal his identity if you want, but nothing comes for free. Hand over the scroll.”

“This?”

Sungchul shook the Harmegeddon scroll in front of him.

“That’s right. Hand that over, and in one year’s time I shall reveal his identity to you.”

It was complete nonsense. Laughter exploded out of Sungchul’s mouth.

‘All these devils are the same.’

Sungchul pretended to fall into thought and turned around.

‘Thud’

The scroll fell to the floor, and the Demon King’s eyes shined bright.

‘Kekeke.... Got him.’

He cried out in triumph in his mind as he thought

‘Once a year passes, my new strengthened form will be born. Once that’s complete, I won’t suffer so easily to this monster as I have in the past at the very least.

He confirmed in his mind that Sungchul had fallen for his scheme, but the one who had been truly fooled was him.

Sungchul was muttering something with his back turned. Not something he had memorized, but a chant that had been accepted into his very being. Sungchul’s consciousness was getting a crystal clear visitation of the ever-blinding Primordial light’s memories that he had had a glimpse of once upon a time. The only source of light in the endless vastness of space, it alone shined and bathed the universe with luminescence; giving birth to or bringing an end to life with its light. Sungchul’s aria began in earnest.

“Hey. Demolisher. M-mind if I ask what you’re doing over there?”

Hesthnius Max detected the terrifying magical aura rising from Sungchul’s body much too late. A complex magical formation bloomed around Sungchul, whose back was still turned, like a flower. The Demon King quickly caught on that the magic in question was one from the school of Cosmomancy.

‘I-is he planning on using Meteor?! When did that bastard learn that?’

Sungchul turned around and scattered whatever he held in his hand toward the Devil King. It was some powder radiating in black. It was a black crystal formed from Alchemy. It wasn’t of the highest quality, but the area covered by the black crystal would greatly enhance the potency of Sungchul’s spells.

“L-let’s not do this!”

The Demon King waved his hands frantically as he backed off.

But inspite of what he said, he began to scan the sky.

‘Something like a meteor only needs to be dodged.’

Unfortunately, Sungchul wasn’t preparing Meteor. He was about to complete his aria while staring directly at the Demon King. Sungchul could feel the endless energy of a star within his body.

An old staff appeared from his Soul Storage. The moment Sungchul gripped the staff, he had a brief moment of nostalgia, and then the aria was complete. He then pointed the staff toward the Demon King while holding Fal Garaz in the other hand.

‘Star Light.’

The moment the activation word was spoken in his mind, a large beam of light was fired from the end of his staff.

“F-force Reversal!!!”

The beam of light enveloped the ethereal Demon King whole. His ethereal body began to burn. No, disintegrate would be the more apt term. Star Light destroyed over half of the Demon King’s form, but the target was the Devil of Devils that reigned over all Demons.

“ARRRRRRRGH!!! RRRRRRGH!!!”

He endured the single cast of Star Light in the end.

“I can’t die... Do you know how I rose to this spot?!”

A powerful will to live flashed in his eyes as he performed recovery magic in the midst of being disintegrated to reconstruct his flesh as it was being torn apart. However, his opponent was not an ordinary magician.

[Echo x1]

As the first beam of light was beginning to fade, another beam of light poured out from the staff and overwhelmed the Demon King that was already in the middle of being torn apart. Taking two hits of Starlight was a bit much, even for the Demon King.

“K....KYAAAAAAK!!!!”

The rate of his recovery could no longer keep up with the rate of destruction, and the Demon King was eventually eradicated by the light. He was erased without even a chance to make an explicative.

“...”

Sungchul was overcome with extreme lethargy and dizziness after the light faded. All of the mana within him had been sucked away as he cast Star Light, a 7th circle magic, and its echo. Sungchul pulled Bertelgia from his Soul Storage.

“You said it’d be quick!”

Bertelgia who had been stabbing herself into Sungchul with the corner of her covers stopped to take a look at her surroundings and asked in a daze.

“Huh? Where’s this?”

Sungchul pointed toward the corpse of the Demon King seated on the massive throne and answered her question.

“It’s the Demon King’s Palace.”

“H-hiiii...! Really? And the Demon King? Is... is he dead?”

Sungchul nodded in reply. In the next moment, the Devil King’s corpse began to turn to dust. As the ethereal form had been destroyed, the physical form that was bound to it was being erased as well.

‘Finally, the First Calamity is resolved.’

There was a rare hint of sentiment lingering in Sungchul’s eyes. However, he was struck by a powerful force that caught his breath in his throat. Something was beginning to unfold. Bright letters soon filled Sungchul’s sight.

[You have resolved the First Calamity.]

[You have obtained the Blessing “One who stands against

Calamity”.]

[The gazes of gods have turned toward you.]

Reward:

1. Blessing “One who stands against Calamity”
 2. Fragment of Calamity
-

Something fell in front of Sungchul. It was a flat piece of rock that reflected a deep green light and gave off a cold feeling. It looked like something of no value at first glance, but Sungchul could not take his eyes off of the piece of rock. His hand reached toward the rock unconsciously. The fragment felt rough to the touch and was cold as ice. It was no ordinary object.

Sungchul tried to inspect the object, but his Eye of Truth did not work on the object.

‘Does that mean it exceeds Legend grade? That might mean this fragment’s grade is Mythic.’

Putting it into his Storage appeared to be the right move for now, but his Soul Storage could not accept the fragment. As the fragment wasn’t able to enter the Storage, it fell to the ground. Surprise crossed Sungchul’s eyes.

‘I seem to have gotten my hands on something unbelievable.’

However, the surprise didn’t end there. Something like a black smoke began to rise from the Demon King’s corpse. It was no simple smoke. Each individual particle that formed the smoke was filled with an evil aura composed of malice and futility.

Sungchul had seen nothing like it before. He had seen something similar when he killed Minamoto and Aquiroa, but it couldn’t be compared with the gigantic smoke interspersed with pure malice that appeared before him now. Sungchul did not know what it was, but he could make a guess.

‘I-is that... the power that drives the Calamity?’

The moment he had internalized that truth, black words obstructed his sight.

[Witness of Calamity]

[You have seen the true essence of Calamity.]

[You who has seen the authority of god has taken a step into the secret of the World.]

[Rewards for being a witness corresponds to Intuition.]

Reward: Magic Power +88, Intuition +88, Magic Resistance +88

He had gained an incredible boon in stats simply by witnessing the flow of Calamity. Sungchul felt like he could understand why the Followers of Calamity wanted the progression of Calamity so desperately.

“What... in the world. These stats... why are they giving so much?”

Bertelgia must have seen a similar message. Watching the progression of Calamity was such an event. Simply witnessing it meant receiving a portion of god’s authority. Magicians didn’t simply become Followers of Calamity out of madness.

The black smoke reconstructed itself to a spherical form near the ceiling and then appeared to move about freely for a while. Soon, the black sphere left the Demon King’s Palace as though it had its own will.

Sungchul hurried after the black sphere. However, a look of shock spread across his eyes the moment he stepped out of the Palace.

“?!”

Every last one of the tens of thousands of demonic forces that had been assembled in the vicinity of the Devil King’s Palace had perished.

‘How did this happen?’

Sungchul had killed some of them with his own hands, but the vast majority of them had been still alive. However, every single last one of them was now dead. The black sphere was draining the corpses of each devil of the dark and evil aura. Every each one of them to the last drop.

Sungchul could only stand and watch this scene unfold. The moment he thought to do something against the sphere, the thought evaporated like ethanol. The inexplicable exhaustion and lethargy were restraining him. A single thought lingered in his mind instead.

As he was restrained by the chains of exhaustion, the black sphere had drained the dark aura from the countless devils to expanded to a massive size. It had been the size of an adult’s head originally, but now it was the size of a castle. The sphere that had now drained the essence of every devil to its heart’s content rose high into the sky before splitting into seven pieces and flying southerly at high speeds. Sungchul could determine what that had meant.

‘The Seven Heroes. Is this the start of their Calamity?’

As to support that theory, whispers that seemed to come from right beside him dug into his ears.

“Don’t get cocky cause you took care of that Demon King.”

“Let’s face off fair and square! Delightful warrior!”

“Such a liar. To not use that scroll. But it doesn’t change anything.”

“... Don’t like.”

“Kekeke... I wonder how your soul tastes?”

“Just you wait, you dimwit.”

“...”

They were the voices of the Seven Heroes. Their voices grew distant until it faded away completely leaving behind their dry laughter.

“...”

Sungchul looked toward the direction that the black fragments had flown with indifferent eyes as he tightened his grip on Fal Garaz

—

Tower of Recluse.

There was an incident at the holiest fortification in charge of the storage and protection of the Scripture of Calamity. The caretakers observed that the first prophecy written on the scroll, the prophecy pertaining to the Demon King, disappeared as if it had went up in flames, and alerted this news to the one in charge of the Tower, Porphyrius. Porphyrius's eyes were in shock as he looked at the Scripture of Calamity.

“Something unthinkable occurred. The First Calamity... has come to an end!”

The next prophecy after the now-burnt Demon King prophecy was reported to have absorbed a dark and ominous smoke-like aura the following day.

The prophecy that had now been set in motion by the power of Calamity read as follows:

[The betrayed, the false heroes of the past who then left a prophecy, shall return to the land. They shall demand what they were denied, what was rightfully theirs. The world shall know when seven ominous stars shine in the skies.]

Chapter 114 – City On Top Of The River

News of the fall of the First Calamity, the Demon King, and the inexplicable slaughter of the Devils of the Demon Realm spread through the continent at a rapid pace. Even the commoners who weren't well familiar with the Calamity were celebrating the sudden extinction of the Demons who had been threatening the northern frontier, but the ones in power with the access to information were trembling in fear of the danger that could appear anytime and anywhere.

Two months passed quickly in equal celebration and fear. There was no sign of the ominous Seven Heroes, but sovereigns of each nation scattered spies within their sovereignty to be the eyes and ears in preparation for the new Calamity.

Meanwhile, in a certain place within the continent, there was a covert but meaningful movement gaining momentum.

“The one who saved us was not the Emperor within the Royal Palace, the 13 Champions of the Continent, nor the churches serving the gods. It was a sole lonesome outcast hero.”

Starting with the soldiers who survived the fierce battle at Harupaya ridge, a movement to commemorate one certain individual began.

It was difficult to make a rational and objective judgement during the battle due to being swept away by passion and group spirit. But after the once-muddy waters settled down, they were able to come to a refreshingly simple and clear conclusion. The Enemy of the World Sungchul Kim, in spite of what is said about him, had come to join the battle to rescue them, and that he killed the dreaded Demon King single-handedly.

It was a feat that the ruling elite neither wanted to nor could achieve.

No one had dared to start it but once an organization to reevaluate the Enemy of the world was created, the people who used to work as Sungchul's subordinates especially soldiers from 'Lion of Lucerne' division formerly led by Sungchul himself – most of whom were forcefully kicked out and became alcoholics – gathered en masse to break their long silence and join. The sudden appearance of a half beautiful half hideous undead girl and a mystical old man who claimed to have met Sungchul personally also caught some attention.

The Human Empire expressed that they would serve punishment to those involved in this rebellious movement taking place in their empire, but regardless, the organization that worshipped Sungchul grew incrementally wider within the darkness. On the other side of the world, Sungchul who was now the focus of all this attention had now left the Demon Realm located on the northernmost end and was instead wandering along the Screaming Sword's Edge Mountain Range on the southernmost end.

—

“Damn it.”

It wasn't a frequent occurrence for profanity to escape Sungchul's lips. He was more inclined to become silent during difficult times, but the searing heat of the Screaming Sword's Edge mountains and the endless torrent of insects, not to mention the labyrinthian jungle that seemed to have no end was enough to test Sungchul's superhuman patience. A complicated dungeon could be resolved by forming his own path through the walls, but here the trees and roots would regrow overnight no matter how much he smashed them down.

“Uuuuh... I think I'm starting to get fungus on my body!”

Bertelgia was also suffering on her own terms. The jungle's musty humidity and abundant bacteria was the worst environment to preserve a book. However, she must have preferred the outdoors

compared to the Soul Storage as she stubbornly followed Sungchul's back and endured. Unfortunately, she appeared to have been reaching her limits.

“Here's a surprise proposition!”

Bertelgia stood in Sungchul's path.

“A quick breather. How about it?”

Sungchul nodded and sought out a good resting spot. There was a benefit to the region known as Screaming Sword's Edge mountains that even the forest-loving elves avoid venturing into: There were many high quality hot springs to rest at. Sungchul headed toward one of these springs that he had his eyes on. It bothered him that this region was littered with skeletons of creatures he didn't recognize, but the hot spring itself was top quality.

Sungchul threw off his clothes and submerged himself into the warm water of the hot spring.

“...”

The Golden Duck that he carried in his pocket was a bonus. Sungchul gazed at the Golden Duck floating on the passive current as he washed away the fatigue built up during his exploration in the jungle. The reason he had traversed to the southernmost Screaming Sword's Edge mountain range from the northernmost Demonic Realm Battlefront was to seek out a secret he had found out about long ago. It was Multicasting. The secret of one of the Seven Heroes, Sajators. However, Sajators was a nasty fellow from start to finish. The two items he had given relating to the Secret tome of Multicasting was completely useless.

The first item which was the map made of Goblin leather, perhaps due to the passage of time, completely didn't match to the point where no landmarks on the map could be found. The second item, the ring with the blue gemstone could only be deciphered in fragmented words that could not be read in any logical form. The

one and only real lead he had was the ancient text written on the bottom half of the map made of Goblin Leather, but unfortunately all Sungjin could manage to do with his level of comprehension was to translate bits and pieces here and there. The message below was what Sungchul could decipher.

[If... you ask... powerful... and strong... morning... It is cute... Small animal... ring... that enjoys... sunshine... shines... the earth... is resolved... together... aria... through... the secret...]

Bertelgia tried her hand at deciphering, just in case, but the results were not largely different. Actually, her knowledge was rather harmful causing her attempt to become more fragmented and chaotic than Sungchul’s attempt.

“Hm...”

It had already been a month since he had been fumbling through the mountain range. His mind and body were growing exhausted by the fruitless exploration, but there was little else he could do. Sungchul who had achieved great heights as a warrior and as a mage didn’t have much opportunity to grow. Multicasting was also a necessary skill in preparing for the upcoming battle with the Seven Heroes. A single high value ability could be the critical difference against an equally matched opponent.

Sungchul submerged his body deep into waters and raised the status window.

“Blessing, Stats.”

[Blessing]

- Indomitable Spirit

(Immunity to Mental Attacks)

- Blessing from the God of Chaos

(Strength, Dexterity, Vitality 10% increase)

- Heir of Heracles

(+100 Strength)

- Bloodline of Berserkers

(Major Bonus to Regeneration when below 10% Vitality)

- Champion of Humanity

(+50 Resilience)

- Rapid Bow of the Kingdom of High Elves

(+30 Dexterity)

- Heart of an Ancient Warrior

(+5 Strength, Resilience, Vitality / Resilience)

- One who Stands against the Calamity

(All stats +10, Qualification)

[Stats]

Strength 999+

Dexterity 864

Vitality 813

Magic Power 592

Intuition 598

Magic Resist 720

Resilience 513

Charisma 28

Luck 28

The Blessing he had earned when taking care of the Demon King had granted him some unknown qualification along with the great boon of raising all of his stats by 10. He wasn't quite sure what it was, but it was definitely not a normal blessing. With a glance at his stats, Sungchul could guess that the one who had granted him the new blessing, The One Who Stands against the Calamity, was powerful enough to overshadow all of his other curses.

It was mainly due to the changes in both his Charisma and Luck. Sungchul's Charisma and Luck had been stuck at 18 and hadn't moved since due to a certain curse. It was an undeniable proof that the existence that had granted him the blessing outranked the one who had cursed him as the curse was undone; allowing the two stats to rise.

'Gods were the main forces behind the Calamity as expected.'

Sungchul who had thought that far shook his head before allowing it to rest. He had come here to relax. All of these complicated thoughts were unnecessary. What he had to do was crystal clear.

When he looked up past the thick foliage, he could see white clouds floating lazily by in the blue sky. Sungchul closed his eyes and allowed himself to relax in the warm water that embraced his body and the lethargic flow of time.

He stood like that for a long time then suddenly out of nowhere, Sungchul felt a presence. It was the presence of someone extremely covert and experienced. Sungchul opened his eyes to seek out the

source of that presence and smirked.

‘Is it a Hot Spring cat?’

It was a massive cat with a coat in the color of the clouds. It was one of the animals that the cruel aristocrats of the Holy Rutheginea Kingdom would keep as pets or as livestock. Its size was about as large as a tiger, but it was a docile creature that enjoyed lazing about the hot spring.

The large cat stood in front of the hot spring, and carefully dipped its front paw in to check its temperature before diving in with a splash. When Sungchul looked over, the bugger peeked back before yawning.

“Woah. Hot Spring cat? That one is adorable.”

Bertelgia who had been drying her body with sunlight on a rock beside the hot spring discovered the cat and flew up into the sky.

“It might be better if you don’t fly around haphazardly.”

As Sungchul was finishing his warning, the Hot Spring Cat popped out of the water and darted toward her.

“Hiii-ii!”

Bertelgia immediately tried to retreat, but the cat was a step faster. The Hot Spring Cat pressed her down to the ground with its wet front paw.

“S-save me!”

Sungchul watched her pitiful form with a smile before speaking to the cat in a soft voice.

“Go away.”

After a brief contest of wills, the cat let out a meow to express its discontent before returning to submerge its body at its previous spot.

“I thought I was dead. Why’s it acting like that? Such a bully!

Papa said that they don't hurt humans..."

"You're a book now. You're the perfect size for it to be curious about."

"Uuu... is that the case?"

Sungchul leaned back and stared off into the sky before pulling out a ring from his Soul Storage and letting the sun reflect off its surface. It was a blue gemstone ring he had received from a quest.

The blue gemstone ring, now soaking in sunlight, radiated with brilliant, yet useless, light in every direction.

'I don't think I'll be able to find an answer at this rate.'

Things were not going well. and that was even with him standing in the thick of it. He desperately wanted to find the clues to Multicasting, but at this rate, there would be no end to it. Sungchul decided to leave the jungle to explore the human territories. It was a bit dangerous, but he had no other ideas. Not only that, but he also had more than a small desire to leave this wretched jungle.

—

Panchuria, the City over the River. There was the Human Empire to the North, and the kingdom of Lizardmen to the south. This independent city that sat between the Screaming Sword's Edge mountain range was reputed for its bustling commerce and abundance in local products, but it also had terrible climates and was infamous for being a cesspool for the human filth that filtered out from various parts of the continent.

This city was composed of many ships that were held together voluntarily, or not so willingly, on top of a large riverbed which gave it the essential ability to literally move the city effectively over water.

"..."

Sungchul sat alone on a sturdy boat made for five passengers. The original owner of the boat was a five-member group of bandits that plundered on the river, but their shout of joy upon discovering Sungchul became their final moment of celebration. Those corpses that would currently be fish food at the bottom of the river had provided Sungchul with the precious gift of an adequate boat and general information about the city. The information held great value to Sungchul who had never stepped foot into Panchuria before.

He leisurely rowed the boat before purchasing some fruit from river-faring fruit vendors that had their wares on display and shoved one into his mouth as he looked around. His eyes finally found the structure it was looking for. It was a massive structure composed of the bodies of 5 galleys held together by wooden boards. The name of this building from which stench of alcohol and the raucous noise of fighting could be heard in the middle of the day was the Emperor's Outhouse.

There were no scholars here. It was a place of pandemonium teeming with nothing but thieves and scam artists that made up the general populace of Panchuria. Sunchul docked his boat onto the Emperor's Outhouse and headed inside the establishment. There was a large wanted poster stuck on the notice board beside the entrance.

[Anyone that can provide information regarding the Enemy of the World will be given a considerable bounty – Governor of Panchuria, Loremei Chui]

Beneath the intense words was a vile illustration of the supposed Enemy of the World. Thankfully, there was no need for Sungchul to hide his face nor change his attire.

‘To think that there was someone worse than me at drawing.’

However, there was a flying book behind that hideous illustration of Sungchul.

“W-what is that? That thing... Is that supposed to be me?”

The book drawn behind Sungchul was shoddy and small with pitiful wings, but more than anything, the book appeared to be quite thin.

“Do they think that I am some sort of children’s picture book or something?!”

Bertelgia’s fury was directed toward her lack of pages.

Sungchul firmly pressed down on Bertelgia who was making a racket inside his pocket to calm her before taking a step into the bar cum meetinghouse known as the Emperor’s Outhouse.

Chapter 115 – City On Top Of The River (2)

The bar was filled with drunk patrons laughing and shouting obnoxiously beyond the door. He could see a glittering chandelier hanging high above their heads. Just about the time when he was thinking that the objet d'art was looking very out of place in this otherwise rather disgusting location, a loud group of musicians making a racket moved past him.

One of the band members stared at him absentmindedly, but then he suddenly grinned and looked away. In the place where the band had passed by, there were all manner of people sitting on the many tables and chairs that had been arranged in rows and columns.

The tables and chairs were fixed to the ground with large nails. The reason needed no explanation. There were drunks fistfighting on a table in the distance with onlookers in a circle making bets on the victor.

“Wow... This.. is no joke. Out of all the bars I've seen, this one is a mess.”

Bertelgia spoke with a slight tremble from her pocket. Sungchul was also in agreement.

‘You'd be hard-pressed to find a place more apt to call a mess than here.’

Sungchul found an empty table and sat while observing the surroundings. He first sought out those who looked particularly dangerous. There was bound to be one or two spies or agents from the upper crust of Panchuria or the Human Empire within a crowd of this many people.

A group of gloomy and hostile individuals soon appeared in his sight. They were positioned on the second-floor terrace from where they overlooked the entirety of the large hall below while

sipping on their beers.

There were six in all, split into 3 groups of 2-member teams, and they seemed to have been swept up in the atmosphere as they appeared quite relaxed. They were more focused on betting with their partners than monitoring and only gave a cursory look whenever a ruckus broke out.

Sungchul continued observing the various crowds in the bar. He particularly took notice of the mannerisms and conversations of those he believed to be regulars.

When he managed to finish his surveillance, Sungchul approached the bartender and made an order in a natural manner.

“Hm? Haven’t seen your face around here before? First time?”

“I came by three years ago. I’m a bit sad that you didn’t recognize me.”

“Ah, is that right? Well, it’s fine either way. What’s your poison?”

Sungchul ordered adequate drinks and food before asking his question with a bit of financial lubrication.

“It’s a bit out of nowhere, but I need some information worth some money.”

“I don’t deal with that stuff, but that Elf Thief in the corner might know something.”

The bartender introduced him to a member of the Thieves’ Guild.

Sungchul devoured the food before heading toward the thief.

[This recipe’s score is 13 points.]

The food here couldn’t be considered tasty.

“Someone recommended you to me.”

Sungchul washed out his mouth with a strong drink before

introducing himself. The thief kept his guard up as he glared at Sungchul, but the latter's mannerism kept the conversation flowing.

There were largely three pieces of information Sungchul wanted from the thief. First was the movements of the Seven Heroes. The Thieves' Guild possessed fast networks all around the continent and would be able to gather external information relatively quickly even in these backwoods. The Elven Thief reported that there was nothing worth mentioning of the Seven Heroes' activities before he frankly stated his own thoughts on the matter.

“Regardless of how great these Seven Heroes claim to be, it'd be difficult for them to move about with the current state of affairs. All of the fat bigwigs are waiting for them to show themselves with their eyes peeled. How would even one of them make an appearance now? The bigwigs would gather a much greater suppression force than they did for the Enemy of the World if that happened.”

The bigwigs who were uninterested when the Demon King was expanding his borders suddenly put everything they had into vigilance when their own livelihood came into jeopardy.

In addition to this, Sungchul asked for information on two more topics. The other two were about the legend of Sajators that had been passed down in this region and about the tales regarding Multicasting. With these two questions, he particularly made sure to avoid the word “Multicasting” and carefully used words associated with it instead. Unfortunately, the Elf didn't seem to have any idea regarding the latter two subjects. He pointed to the old man harassing the female staff of the establishment in another corner instead.

“Well, I'm just a person that had wandered in here, so I don't know much about history and stuff, but that old fogey might know something.”

As soon as the words left the Elf's lips, the old man was beaten up by a younger healthier man and was laid out onto the table like a frog. The second-floor observers' callous gazes swept over in that direction, but they quickly lost interest and moved back to what they were doing.

"Turned out the guy was an alderman some odd years ago. He even published a few books."

Sungchul approached the old man when every single one of the observers had turned their gazes away. When he got near, the stench of cheap booze rolled out in waves.

"The fist of a man that hasn't surpassed 100 in Strength won't leave a mark on my skin!"

But in contrast to the old man's bold claims, blood was pouring from his nose. Sungchul handed him a rag as he spoke.

"I heard you were familiar with the history of this region."

"History? Of Panchuria? What history is there to a shithole of a city made of planks? Would there be a history of a den of bats filled with shit and piss?"

The old man didn't seem to be quite of his own mind yet. Sungchul temporarily let him be and looked behind instead. It was because the entire establishment had gone silent as though someone had doused the entire place with cold water.

At the door of the building, a group of people resembling humans had entered. Head of a snake, slithering tongue and the wide, scaly humanoid body just below it; they were the Lizardmen. They were famous as a race that created a world of their own, having raised a kingdom centered around the Screaming Sword's Edge Mountains and extending out into the great expanse of marshes and jungles around it.

"Woah... It's the lizardmen. It's my first time seeing them in person."

Bertelgia could not hide her awe as she shrunk into her pocket to peek from within. This was also Sungchul's first time seeing the Lizardmen so close. His mind suddenly flashed back to a peaceful moment in the past.

"You might not know it, but the Lizardmen hold the most ideal society within Other World. It might be nice if you manage to find yourself in the Great Wetlands and see it for yourself. See how they act on their own sense of duty and how well they work together. Humans might not even be able to mimic such a thing."

That teenager who was looking out at a distance with a passionate voice later became the emperor.

'Are these the Lizardmen who you couldn't stop praising?'

Sungchul scattered the memories of his past and focused on the lizardmen that had entered the building. The Lizardmen who were individually donned with armor casually took seats at the counter before making their orders with a lisp.

"One mealworm special. Don't skimp on the pepper fruits."

"Give me a fresh horse head, if you got one. Donkey is fine as well."

"A shot of hard liquor with calf blood. Shaken not stirred."

Despite how they appeared, they were very specific in their tastes. The server courteously handed them a dish as though he was already familiar with the Lizardmen already. A bumpy wooden dish filled with wriggling mealworms was on the counter. The server didn't spare any of the pepper fruits before handing it to an armored lizardman.

"Here's the mealworm special with plenty of pepper fruits."

"Mmmm..."

The Lizardman must have had a difficult personality because he stared into the bowl for a long while before cautiously tasting the

content with his tongue.

‘Bang!’

The Lizardman suddenly slammed onto the table angrily.

“This is a 3-year-old mealworm! I don’t eat anything below 4-year-old mealworms. Take it back right away!”

It appeared that there was a palate to eating insects.

The server appeared troubled as he attempted to persuade the Lizardman to eat it anyways while explaining that he had nothing better to serve him. The Lizardman muttered under his breath as he swallowed all of the mealworms with the peppers in tow.

“Ugh... why are you being so difficult? What difference does it make whether it’s a 3-year-old or 4-year-old mealworm? You’re going to eat it all anyway!”

The chilled atmosphere caused by their appearance soon grew heated once again. There was a simple reason why the humans feared the lizardmen. It was because they were strong. They were born with powerful physiques, possessed rapid regenerative abilities and were resistant to diseases while also bearing sharp fangs and a muscular tail that humans did not have.

They also lived with a steadfast belief of predestination that made them fearless warriors in battle. This all meant that there was nothing to gain from making enemies of them.

Sungchul observed the Lizardmen for quite a bit before deciding that they weren’t much different from humans.

‘I can’t figure out what makes them any different.’

Sungchul sunk another shot of liquor down his throat and looked around for anything of interest. A group of men and women who were making an unusually loud fuss nearby stood out. By appearances, they looked like traditional hunters, but the game they hunted was an unexpectedly small rodent. What was likely to

be the hunters' catch of the day was laid out over the table.

‘Are those Carbuncles?’

He had never seen a live one before, but he had seen several of the creature's hides or objects crafted from their parts.

To begin with, Carbuncles were intelligent creatures. They may appear to be a cousin to squirrels, but there was a large ruby embedded into their forehead that was larger than an eye which they used to cast magic. Carbuncles were known to be the only creature incapable of speech that could cast magic.

At one point, these creatures were easily sighted within all parts of the forest, but the gemstone in their forehead dyed in beautiful colors and markings, not to mention their magical power, resulted in them being hunted indiscriminately until they were known to be facing extinction. It appeared as though they might have a habitat near the Screaming Sword's Edge mountain range.

“...”

Sungchul was not a nature conservationist, but seeing rare animals killed and pitifully laid out like that did not sit well with him. On the other hand, Bertelgia was shouting excitedly on seeing the Carbuncle corpses.

“Wow! Carbuncle crystals! Those are really rare Alchemic ingredients! You have plenty of gold. Why don't you try your hand at haggling?”

“Mm...”

He wasn't happy about it, but hearing that it was rare ingredient moved Sungchul to walk over to the hunters.

There were six Carbuncle corpses laid out on the table in all. One of the hunters turned to look at Sungchul who was lingering behind them. Sungchul immediately spoke his intentions.

“Can I buy those Carbuncle crystals there?”

“Carbuncle crystals?”

The hunter scanned Sungchul’s appearance from top to bottom. Worn down attire with a face that seemed far from aristocracy. Not a single piece of accessory was eye-catching. However, he saw a golden brooch that was peeking out from beneath his coat and changed his mind.

“This is a bit pricey. How much do you got?”

At the hunter’s question, Sungchul pulled out a single gold coin of high grade from the Empire and laid it on the table. One man’s eyes lit up. It was the drunken old man that was bleeding from his nose. The hunters, on the other hand, remained indifferent. They waved away the old man that ran toward them with his mouth agape and sharply shot back toward Sungchul.

“It’s not even close with just one.”

With this, Sungchul shot back in kind with a low voice.

“I don’t think there’s anything to gain from flashing gold around? Why don’t you just tell me how much is enough.”

The hunters looked back at Sungchul after hearing those words and held a smug smile on their face. After a brief back and forth the deal was set at three Carbuncle crystals in exchange for twenty gold coins. They told Sungchul that three of these were sadly going to be sold for a lower price thanks to a certain precious customer.

“I am all for breaking that promise, but there is no way to earn your keep around here without that man’s grace so it can’t be helped.”

The hunters separated the Carbuncle crystals from the corpses and handed them to Sungchul. There was a slight fishy stench as Sungchul received the crystals and paid with his gold coin.

The hunter who received the gold coins pulled off the glove he was wearing to gauge the gold’s feel and weight. At that moment, a familiar light caught Sungchul’s eye coming from the hand of the

hunter that was confirming the gold coins.

‘Isn’t that the blue gemstone ring?’

It was the same ring that he couldn’t figure out the purpose of. Although this particular ring looked far inferior to the blue gemstone ring that he had in his possession.

“What is that for?”

Sungchul abruptly asked.

“This? It’s my lucky charm.”

The hunter absentmindedly answered him.

Sungchul checked the hands of the other hunters as well. There were two others that had also taken off their gloves, but they were not wearing the ring.

‘Could it be simply coincidence?’

As Sungchul was immersed in thought, the hunter who had checked the gold lightly tapped the table.

“Done verifying. I hope there’s another good opportunity to trade like this.”

With that, the deal was complete. Sungchul returned to this seat and placed the Carbuncle crystals on the table for Bertelgia to look at.

“Eh hem. This is high quality. Since it’s this quality, we might be able to make it even if you were short by a few.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“You know, making a golem, or a golem, or a golem.”

Bertelgia let out a strong vibration from her pocket to reflect her good mood. Sungchul firmly pressed on her to calm her before asking again.

“Is it the main ingredient for golems?”

“That’s right! Not the cheap knock-offs, but the real golems!”

While they were speaking, a man lingered in front of Sungchul. Sungchul looked up to see who it was, and it turned out to be none other than the nose bleeding old drunk.

Sungchul spoke callously.

“What’s your intention?”

The old man felt his heart sink from the hostility instilled in Sungchul’s sharp gaze, but liquid courage allowed him to speak with much difficulty.

“You, just now. Didn’t you ask about this city’s history?”

“I did, and?”

Sungchul placed the Carbuncle crystals into his Soul Storage before fixing his stature.

The bloodshot eyes of the old man lit up.

‘He even has a Soul Storage... Undoubtedly this man... is incredibly wealthy!’

The old man wiped off the drool before continuing to speak.

“I didn’t remember so good before from the alcohol, but now that I’m a bit more sober, I definitely recall something!”

His words lacked credibility. But Sungchul knew that anyone could break down and fall from grace. He pulled out his own blue gemstone ring from his pocket as a test and laid it before the old man.

“Do you know where this is used?”

Chapter 116 – City on top of the River (3)

The old man's eyes grew wide when he saw the blue gemstone ring. He covered the ring with both of his wrinkled hands and spoke in a warning.

“This is not something to take out lightly.”

His voice reeked heavily of alcohol, but as Sungchul knew the man had no ill will, Sungchul put the ring away into his pocket and looked up at him nonchalantly.

“Tell me more.”

The old man was cautious of his surroundings, especially the hunters, as he spoke carefully.

“It's a secret of their kind; the blue gemstone ring is used as bait for the Carbuncles.”

“It's the first time I've heard of this.”

“It's not surprising. Using the blue gemstone ring to hunt Carbuncles is unique to the Panchurian region.”

“What's the reason behind it?”

“Like humans, who choose their mates according to the attractiveness of the other's appearance, Carbuncles have a tendency to place an importance on the clarity and the chroma of the gem on their forehead. It could be said that the stones are their measure of beauty. The light reflected by the blue gemstone is considered similar to their favorite color.”

“In short, the blue gemstone works to attract the Carbuncles like bait.”

“Exactly. If not for that, it would be hard enough to find the Carbuncles; much less hunt them. They are small, and they also use magic making them supernaturally elusive.”

The first impression of the old man was poor, but his words now seemed trustworthy. This was especially true as the old man's words seemed to be related to the text that Sungchul had poorly deciphered.

‘Cute... Tiny animals... ring... love it... I remember seeing those words. The part about the cute animals could be referring to Carbuncles. The ring must be referring to the blue gemstone ring.’

However, it wasn't clear how Carbuncles were related to Multicasting. The truth about Multicasting was still veiled in fog, but it was enough to gain that small hint.

Sungchul handed the old man a single gold coin as compensation.

“Buy yourself some drinks.”

The old man was befuddled as he wrapped both hands onto the gold coin and put it to his lips.

“How long had it been since the last gold coin? Ah, this unchanging seductive light!”

He hadn't noticed anything suspicious, but Sungchul decided to stop his conversation with the man for now. He wasn't happy that the old man was well known enough here to catch the interested peeks of some onlookers and the fact that the hunters who had completed the trade earlier whispered amongst themselves as they looked his way also bothered Sungchul. In an unruly place like Panchuria, it wasn't beneficial if the rumor of an unfamiliar traveler loaded with gold were to spread. Sungchul asked him where he lived before promising to meet again and then left the establishment.

—

When the sun had set, Sungchul headed toward the old man's home. His home was a small boat that was anchored as though it had become beached near a reed forest in the downstream area of town. To be living in this poor side of town in a city like Panchuria

where sewage and garbage from homes were dumped straight into the river below meant that he was truly living a meager life. It was because the sewage drifting from the wealthier neighborhoods flowed down toward this section. The smell was a given, but it was still poor sanitation. This was especially true during rainy days when the filthiness was at its most extreme.

The name of the old man that lived in this forest of reeds filled with stench and garbage was Kruut Asaam. He began talking about various things that weren't asked of him such as belonging to family that was part of the chapter that formed the cornerstone of the Free City of Panchuria, and had once upon a time commanded enough influence to bring visible change to the city. The meat of his story began as one or two of the lamps that faintly lit up the city on the river was beginning to be lit.

"There are many different speculations regarding the origins of this city, but nothing is for sure. It just happened. Someone speculated that the city was formed by the people fleeing from the invasion of the Centaur Army of a previous era to the river, but it's just a rumor as any other in my opinion."

The old man put forth several theories postulated by the amateur academics followed by his own opinions on them. The old man was sincere and rather enthusiastic in his explanation, but to Sungchul the topic did not matter one way or another.

He began to yawn after listening through many such dry stories.

"This doesn't really seem to be the type of story that you should pay to hear."

As he did so, Kruut thought for a moment before making a decision on his own. He began to speak with a subtle tone.

"It doesn't seem like you're all that interested. How about this?"

The old man began to stir up the brazier situated between Sungchul and himself with his poker to excite the flames; then he

looked around cautiously before speaking again.

“Everything I have said up to now was the theories of no-name academics speaking without experience, but the story I’m about to tell you now is something unique that I, Kruut Asaam, have spent three days in Lagrange’s floating library on my own two feet to dig through countless books to find.”

Sungchul had no real expectations, but still, he chose to lean in for a closer listen. Kruut laid forth something unique as he had claimed before.

“Up to this point, all of the theories were made with the premise that Panchuria’s ancestors were refugees or wanderers from the North and written with the purpose of supporting that claim. But the way I see it, it’s all wrong.”

Kruut shoved his wrinkled face closer to Sungchul as he whispered discreetly.

“Those that made Panchuria came from the South.”

“The South?”

Sungchul had a lukewarm response. The south was the territory of the Lizardmen. There were Centaurs, Orcs, Ogres further south, and there was nothing but warmongering races of savages living in the wastelands. No matter where they were in the south, it wasn’t possible for humans to live there. What the old man was saying was not feasible for these reasons.

“It looks like you don’t believe me. Figures, everyone had the same response. However, I believe that there is a lost kingdom beyond the Screaming Knife’s Edge mountain range within the Lizardmen territory.”

“Your proof?”

The old man’s face grew resentful at Sungchul’s question, and he let out a deep sigh. He popped open a single bottle of spirit rolling around a corner of his boat, and drained it into his gullet before

continuing.

“I have already spent too much money looking for that proof. As you know, it takes a considerable investment to look into the Lizardmen’s territory.”

“It sounds like you called in mercenaries?”

The old man nodded and spoke with a groan.

“Thanks to that, I lost all of the money I inherited. I lost my status. I wasn’t able to mend my relationship with my son when I had the chance which made my granddaughter resent me. It’s why I’m stuck living here sniffing shit and urine by myself.”

It was a typical tale of failure one could hear anywhere. Sungchul did not feel even the smallest bit of empathy for the old man. Everything had been brought on by his own efforts. Where else could he place the blame?

Sungchul felt exhaustion instead of pity and made an effort to get up.

‘So nothing ties this city to Sajators? Well, it is true Sajators lived thousands of years ago. Even if he did visit here, it would have been nothing but a brief pass-by.’

The old man suddenly grabbed Sungchul’s arm when he stood up to leave.

“My story isn’t done yet! The meat of the story starts from here!”

“Be brief.”

Sungchul spoke with a frosty tone as he remained standing.

“I had almost discovered the city. Beyond the Screaming Knife’s Edge mountain range, I had almost found the lost city that had been formed within the Lizardmen’s territory!”

“...”

“I really discovered the entrance! If that cowardly mercenary

captain hadn't run away at that time, I would be boasting away about how I had discovered the lost city!"

He unfolded a dirty piece of paper after searching through his pockets. It turned out to be a map drawn by hand under the light. It was poorly organized and difficult to read which made it more of a rough map.

'It's nothing much.'

As Sungchul thought as such, Bertelgia vigorously shook her body from Sungchul's pocket. Sungchul excused himself from Kruut and headed toward the bow before speaking quietly to her.

"What is it?"

"That map just now!"

"Hm?"

"That map. Isn't it similar to that other one? The one drawn by Sajators."

"Is that right?"

Sungchul opened up the map drawn on Goblin flesh and compared it with the one held by the old man. There was nothing similar to the naked eye. Both of them were drawn sloppily with no scale and were made in different styles. However, the important landmarks noted by both maps were similar.

Sungchul could feel this massive headache that had been troubling him for an eternity slowly beginning to resolve as he seriously began to compare both maps. He found several points of similarity. The lone rock, the stream of rusted water, the white monkey habitat were landmarks that he could not physically locate despite all his efforts, but were drawn on both maps.

"Did you draw this map yourself?"

Sungchul asked Kruut with a slightly different tone of voice. Kruut nodded vigorously.

“I drew it all myself! I sought them out with my own two feet as I drew them.”

“Guide me.”

Sungchul tossed the old man a sack filled with gold coins. The old man checked its contents before making a subtle smile, but shaking his head he said,

“It won’t be enough with this.”

Sungchul handed him another sack of coins, but the old man put up three fingers.

“I’ll form an exploratory team. The one with the best skills.”

“I don’t need a team.”

“Ahem! That’s foolish talk! You don’t seem to understand the terror of lizardmen. Not to mention that you’ll need an experienced pathfinder to get through the jungle that constantly messes with your cardinal directions.”

The old man passionately defended their need for a large-scale exploratory team with spittle flying out of his mouth. While listening to his incoherent ramblings, Sungchul realized that the old man had no knowledge regarding the jungle. Kruut was nothing more than a veteran employer than a veteran explorer.

‘It can’t be helped.’

He had plenty of funds. Sungchul set forth the condition of keeping his financial involvement a secret before agreeing to Kruut’s request.

Two days later, Kruut appeared before the Emperor’s Outhouse wearing a fancy coat instead of his usual rag. He stood before two fit mercenaries and raised his voice for his announcement before all those watching him.

“I will now be gathering members for the 12th Kruut expedition. Those who consider themselves as outstanding step forward!”

Bertelgia who was watching this scene from the rear made a bitter remark.

“Eeeh... he did this nonsense 11 more times? No wonder he went broke.”

—

There was a sudden storm brewing within the distant Ancient Kingdom as Sungchul was forming his exploratory team with Kruut. Ancient Kingdom, located on the north western portion of the continent, has a long history as a major power. The official designation of the country is ‘Kingdom’.

The reason why Ancient Kingdom stresses the designation of Kingdom is because the very first king in recorded history, the Sword King, ascended to the throne and formed the very first kingdom. The Kingdom worshipped the sword and distanced themselves from magic and boasted of their might throughout the continent with the formation of innate swordsmen known as Sword Masters. They had been called Kingdom as they built up their power, but when they retreated from the hegemony of the continent, they adopted the name of Ancient Kingdom to differentiate itself from the other Kingdoms.

On this day, an unwelcome guest appeared at Wuldmark, the capital of this Ancient Kingdom. Wielding a single rusty iron sword worn with use as though to mock this kingdom of swords, this man obstructed the main road leading to the capital and started cutting down all that caught his eye.

It was first assumed to be nothing more than commotion caused by a crazy man. But once a Royal Guard Swordsmaster, the pride of the Ancient Kingdom, was sliced apart by the man’s sword, the Captain of the Royal Guard Ghenghis Aaron urgently sent request for reinforcements from all corners of the world. The notice he had sent out was as follows:

[One of the Seven Heroes has appeared in Wuldmark.]

Each country who were shockingly united in the defense of their ruling class immediately scrambled reinforcements for Wuldmark. When an awe-inspiring fleet of dozens of airships arrived above the capital of the Ancient Kingdom and began bombardment as thousands of elite soldiers moved to cut off the escape routes, the unknown swordsman disappeared without a trace. His identity remained a secret to the end, but the high ranking commanders he faced recalled his name. A name that had once been uttered with reverence, but now with repulsion.

“Dragoman of the Seven Heroes. The one that reached the peak of the sword appeared in the capital of the Ancient Kingdom.”

The opinion regarding the man’s identity as Dragoman wasn’t unanimous, but the fact that he was one of the Seven Heroes had no doubts.

—

Within a dark cave.

It was a cold and damp place where cloudy water infused with calcium deposit poured out like waterfalls and stalactites reflected faint lights as they obstructed the line of sight. A man entered the waterfall to wash away his blood-soaked clothes and then proceeded further into a deeper area of the cave. A woman’s voice greeted him as though she had been waiting for him.

“How was it, Dragoman? The resistance of those living in the present? It wasn’t as easy as you thought was it?”

A pale white hand was strumming a harp. It was a gloomy and mournful piece.

“I could have taken care of them on my own, but I only left because of something I call ‘Captain’s Orders’.”

The man referred to as Dragoman pulled out the rusted sword from its scabbard. The blade was soaked in plenty of blood, but the dripping blood disappeared completely not long after. The blade

had drunk the blood on its own.

“The captain’s judgement is calculative. There is no need to reveal our strength as of yet. There is bound to be some unexpected potential among these mortals; just as it was for us.”

The woman partially veiled by the darkness spoke in a flirtatious voice. Dragoman simply scoffed with a wretched expression on his face.

“What nonsense.”

“Don’t we also have that brilliant tool made by that kid?”

The melody of the harp stopped. The woman playing the harp turned her head and looked behind her. On the far side of this massive cave, there was a dark figure taking space under a faint light. It was something massive with an oppressive presence that couldn’t be believed to be made by human hands.

Chapter 117 – Ruins (1)

It looked as though there was something to be gained from the eleven largely failed past expeditions. Kruut Asaam quickly and efficiently found the members he needed and formed an exploratory party. Several scammers applied for the money, but Asaam's sharp, discerning eye did not allow such unsuitable men to participate in this expedition.

It didn't even take three days for a party of twelve to be formed for the expedition. Kruut who had successfully gathered the party announced its completion to Sungchul, the financier, with pride.

“There's a bad atmosphere about the scammers. I can tell who's planning to take the money and flee by just their eyes, and when it comes to mercenaries, it's actually preferable to find ones who demand stringent and detailed exit agreement. The reason being those that are untrustworthy give no importance to the terms of the agreement since they can just bounce out of town at the first sign of trouble.”

Kruut who had been living in the slums as a vagrant looked healthy and bursting with energy unbefitting of his age as he transformed into a fancy expedition leader overnight. The day after forming the expedition, he had everyone including Sungchul divided among three small boats that were just large enough to seat five. He had even managed to get a lizardman ferrymen on each boat. They wordlessly watched the humans board with their cold reptilian stare as their tongues flicked back and forth from their lips.

Kruut appeared at the docks with three laborers for odds and ends.

“Let's get going!”

It looked as though Kruut's 12th expedition caused quite a stir within Panchuria. There were several onlookers gathered at the

narrow planks around the docks to watch the scene with amusement.

“I don’t know where he got the money from, but if he fails this time, it’ll be impossible for him to get back up.”

“Isn’t he already ruined? I think I saw him living in the slums.”

The people weren’t optimistic. Their scornful whispers followed them like a shadow. However, there wasn’t a single change in Kruut’s expression. He appeared to be at peace as he put on a steely composure while facing the mockery poured against him.

‘You’ll all see. If I succeed this expedition, no one will be able to laugh at my efforts.’

Kruut who held such resolution had a single weakness. There was a small boat chasing after them at a rapid pace as they slowly departed from the docks.

“Again! What are you up to this time?!”

Was it a baker? A young woman with an apron and oven mitts was desperately rowing her oars. She must have had a good deal of strength, because the speed of her rowing was abnormal. Sungchul watched the woman’s boat splitting the waters and couldn’t help but think of a motorboat.

The woman’s boat suddenly caught up to the fleet and smashed into the boat carrying the old man before the woman leaped onto the boat with surprisingly agile movements.

“What were you thinking starting this up again? Where did you even get the money?!”

Sungchul who was mingled in with the laborers on the old man’s boat watched the pair with indifferent eyes. Kruut who had brushed off every critical gaze of the people buckled before this woman as though he was being confronted by his maker.

“T-that is... Clarise. I’m REALLY going to succeed the expedition

this time. The course was revised to be completely safe unlike last time, the expedition crew are of the highest quality, and the contingent fee is also quite lucrative...”

“Shut it!”

The young woman pulled at the old man’s arm in an effort to get him onto her boat.

“How much longer are you going to continue with this foolishness! Cancel the contract immediately and hand over your remaining money!”

Kruut looked indecisive.

“Hand over the money right now! It’s just money that you’re going to pour down the toilet, so just hand it over!”

As their scuffle grew longer, one of the mercenaries pulled the woman named Clarise away from the old man. He was an old knight and the leader of the mercenaries. Kruut gave a look of thanks toward the man.

“Just leave, lady. Regardless of who you are, we have to do our job.”

Clarise no longer fought back as a third party stepped in, but once she found Kruut hiding behind a slender mercenary after craning her neck this way and that, she uttered words laced with resentment.

“Remember this. I’ve already severed ties, but I won’t so much as look at you any longer. I’m going to the city hall to change the accursed last name that is mocked by everyone in town!”

The expedition fleet that had been delayed by the sudden happening began to split the waters to move forward once again. Kruut poured out his painful apology toward Sungchul, his financier, with an apologetic face.

“I am truly sorry. I’ve shown you something unsightly.”

“Who was that woman?”

Sungchul could vaguely figure it out, but he asked feigning ignorance.

“My granddaughter.”

There were countless emotions intermingled with that single word: granddaughter.

“I see.”

Sungchul didn't press him any further. It was because he didn't particularly care.

The old man opened his mouth once again as they left the city borders and entered the upstream that connected into the jungle.

“She sings well. Has a talent for it. She enjoys it herself as well.”

The old man who was staring off into the distance while uttering bitter words clenched his fists as though he had come to some kind of a resolution. The fact that the man was deeply resolved to succeed was self evident, but the world doesn't go the way we want.

“What the... did the path change?”

The old man looked surprised as he compared the scenery opening up before him and the map that he had drawn himself. The marked path and his map were different.

“H-how could this be? There was definitely a waterway in this direction last time.”

However, there was a tree about the span two outstretched arms standing in the path that he had indicated. There was no way that a boat could cross through.

The mercenaries and hunters that were boarded on another boat were callously watching the old man's panicked actions. The boat holding the mercenaries approached the old man's boat. Their leader, the old knight, spoke to Kruut with a solemn appearance.

“The contract stated that you knew the path to the destination and that this foreknowledge could be assured. If that is no longer the case, I’m afraid we’re going to have to back out of this one.”

He shoved the contract that was still wet with fresh ink into Kruut intending to pressure him. The fact that skilled mercenaries were more fastidious regarding their contracts was now becoming an obstacle for Kruut.

“It might not be wise to take any detours. This place is filled with signs of Lizardmen.”

The hunters were trying to push Kruut into a corner. They pointed to the ropes dyed in blue, white, red and deep red which were tied off in various places around the jungle. They were tied off by the Lizardmen, and were a form of territorial markings indicating that intruders will not be forgiven. This meant that it was impossible to continue forward, but it was also impossible to take any detours.

Kruut was beset with enemies on all sides. He looked toward Sungchul with a pained expression. He was asking for more money.

Sungchul intentionally avoided his gaze.

‘Is this a dead end?’

It wasn’t like he had high expectations to begin with.

They began to discuss new conditions as Kruut gathered the mercenary leader and the hunters. Other than Kruut’s angry outbursts, it was a dry and quiet conversation. Sungchul looked around their surroundings as they had their discussion. It was the same green hell that he had been wading through for the past month, He slightly trembled in irritation as he waited for time to flow by.

“...”

It didn’t seem like their discussion was going to end anytime

soon. Sungchul didn't particularly dislike solitude, but he detested boredom accentuated by the actions of others to the point of revulsion.

“Just as I suspected, it looks like that old man was a scam all along.”

Bertelgia complained from her pocket. Sungchul was thinking along the same line, but he didn't condemn the old man to this opinion because he knew that Kruut's passion was real at the very least.

Sungchul's eyes drifted toward the Lizardman boatmen. They looked disinterested at the argument unfolding before them and were muttering something amongst themselves. Sungchul tried to eavesdrop, but he couldn't hear anything. Their voices were too soft, and their unique accent caused by their slithering tongue scrambled the sound making it even more difficult to hear.

‘Wait...’

Curiosity lit up in Sungchul's eyes. Why couldn't he think of it earlier? The true owners of the jungle located within the Screaming Knife's Edge mountain range were not the residents of Panchuria, but the Lizardmen. The jungle was a place of exploration for Panchurians like Kruut, but to the Lizardmen, it was no different than their living room. If they really did know something, then asking the lizardmen would be faster.

‘Well, there were really no opportunities to meet with lizardmen in the past.’

Lizardmen were particularly wary people with great reservations about other races. Regarding this point, Kruut might have possessed more talent than he expected judging from the fact that he managed to hire four difficult-to-communicate lizardmen rowers.

‘How do you talk to these guys anyways?’

He needed some sort of pretext. The lizardmen were notorious fatalists. A blunt approach might only bring unintentional suspicion and hostility. It didn't take long until Sungchul remembered that he had something in his pocket that could arouse their interest. He pulled out the Golden Ducky, the bathing companion that would always shine with a golden luster, and floated it on the murky river water.

The Golden Ducky floated on the water toward where the Lizardmen were gathered.

“Oh my.”

Sungchul naturally hopped onto their boat to recover the Golden Ducky. As he did so, he eavesdropped on their conversation.

“That shop's mealworm special is no longer the best. There are rumors that the mountain herbs aren't so fresh and the mealworms are underdeveloped.”

“To mess around with food. Those humans are unsalvageable species!”

They were having a rather unproductive conversation. One of the lizardmen noticed Sungchul climb aboard their boat and turned to look at him with his tongue slithering back and forth. His face was difficult to read, but he had a wary presence. The other lizardmen also stopped talking, and they all looked at Sungchul. It wasn't animosity, but there was a cold atmosphere of hostility.

Sungchul retrieved the Golden Ducky with a smooth motion and showed it to the Lizardmen.

“I needed to get this thing.”

He then floated the Golden Ducky where the Lizardmen could see it. The lizardmen showed interest when they saw the golden duck float despite appearing to be made of gold that shouldn't be able to float on water.

“Human. What is this? A trick?”

A lizardman began the conversation.

“No trick. Why not just try it yourself?”

Sungchul held out the Golden Ducky to the Lizardman in the front. He was upwards of two meters tall with a massive harpoon and net slung around his back. His tongue slithered in and out as he carefully examined the Golden Ducky. He was particularly obsessed with trying to shake the Golden Ducky to see if there were some air compartments inside.

“Mmm.”

Its weight was quite hefty, and its texture felt like pure gold. The Lizardman let his tongue hang out as he lowered his body to float the Golden Ducky onto the water. It fell onto the river with a small plop and wavered precariously before it was submerged halfway into the water, but it eventually burst forth from it like a phoenix. Sounds of celebration spilled out from the Lizardmen’s mouths.

“Harasho!”

Sungchul watched the Lizardmen cheer with indifference.

“This is really amazing.”

“How did you make it, human?”

The Lizardmen began to push each other for an opportunity to talk to Sungchul. They smelled of something similar to peanut butter.

Sungchul wiped down the Golden Ducky with the rag that he always carried with a serious expression before placing it back into his pocket.

“It’s the power of Alchemy.”

“Alchemy!”

As everything was progressing smoothly, a sudden scream burst

out from the front. It wasn't the usual voice of Kruut, but the voice of the solemn Mercenary Captain.

“Are you planning on killing us all? We might not have arrived here for long, but I know full well how many men have died pitifully by your hands. We have no desire to die such pitiful deaths, so let's just leave it at that.”

The mercenaries were shouting profanities with their captain at the lead while stepping onto an empty boat. Kruut, whose face was already red with fury, gulped down another swig of liquor before shouting toward the mercenaries.

“Hand over the deposit! At least hand the deposit over before you leave!”

The mercenaries only smirked in response.

“What a pathetic man that doesn't even understand the concept of deposits. The one who broke the terms of the contract is you.”

“Hand it over! My money!”

Bertelgia who heard this began to mutter aloud.

“Huh? It's our money, isn't it?”

“My money.”

Sungchul corrected her.

“If you feel wronged, feel free to sue when you get back. We will respect the decision of the court.”

There was no boatman, but the mercenaries rowed the oars themselves to slowly return to the city. Kruut's face flushed red then blue as he simply watched them helplessly. Once the mercenaries left, the hunters in charge of pathfinding began to gather on another boat.

“Since there are no more mercenaries to protect us, it'll be difficult for us to continue along with you. Feel free to call us up once you've hired more mercenaries.”

The hunters left as well. All that remained with Kruut were the Lizardman boatmen and the laborers. The old man who had realistically been left to fend for himself began to scream something indiscernible while pulling at his hair. Kruut's 12th expedition came to an end here. The blameless laborers simply watched the old man with a discontent expression on their face. The Lizardmen looked at the despairing old man and began to mutter amongst each other.

“A human that doesn't understand the whimsical nature of the Tree Mother trying to be an explorer? How laughable.”

“What could he do? Our workload just decreased thanks to that though.”

It was impossible to decipher the facial expressions of the Lizardmen, but Sungchul discovered that they were making a similar expression to when they were observing the Golden Ducky. In other words, they were happy.

‘Ah, these demihumans. They look like they know something.’

It felt like the rusted needle of the compass was finally shifting.

“Hey, friends.”

Sungchul called out to the Lizardmen. Their lizard eyes all turned toward Sungchul's direction.

“Well, it looks like the work finished faster than expected. How about it? I was thinking of having a round.”

Their eyes flashed a strange light, but they eventually nodded.

“I wish to hear more about this Alchemy, human.”

Kruut Asaam's adventure had come to an end, but Sungchul adventure had begun anew.

Chapter 118 – Ruins (2)

“You make it like this.”

Sungchul handed the newly made Golden Duck to the Lizardmen and their eyes began to shine brightly.

“Amazing. This thing referred to as Alchemy of Humans.”

The praise was directed toward Sungchul, but Bertelgia began to vibrate in her pocket from joy. Sungchul managed to get information regarding the jungle in return for crafting the Golden Duck. The Lizardman referring to himself as Rolling Stone spoke.

“That old man wouldn’t know this in his wildest dreams, but the paths within the jungle changes frequently. According to the whims of the spirit residing within the jungle that is. We call it Tree Mother. If you seek to find your path within the jungle, it would be best if you first learn how to gain her favor.”

Sungchul threw out another question.

“The lost city that Kruut Asaam was searching for... Does that city really exist?”

He asked the question point-blank, and the Lizardmen began to look toward each other while being selective in the words they chose to say.

“I cannot answer that question, Human friend. As all things living in the jungle must seek out food on their own, you must seek out what you want in the jungle yourself.”

Rolling Stone politely explained their hesitance. Sungchul wasn’t too disappointed. The important information were the facts that the paths within the jungle changed periodically and that the change was directed by the whims of a spirit called Tree Mother. He had already gained much from learning just these two things.

Sungchul began preparations for another trip after they parted

ways. He obtained various things such as fresh water, dried food, insect-repelling incense, and a net to cover his body. They were the small bits of wisdom he had gained from his time in the jungle.

A familiar voice rang out from behind as he slung his fully loaded pack over his shoulder to return to his boat.

“Hey, Mr. Summoned.”

It was Kruut Asaam. He was looking awful, making a face like a dog drenched in rain.

“I don’t need any of my investment returned. The decision to trust you was my own.”

“T-thank you, but I have a request.”

“Speak.”

When Sungchul acquiesced, the old man bowed his head and pleaded with tears in his eyes.

“Once more... can you invest in me once more? Things fell apart because I hired the wrong people, but if you invest a bit more, I can get the very best...”

“My business with you has come to an end.”

Sungchul coldly cut him off and began to walk toward the docks. He could hear steps following behind him.

“Please, I beg of you. Just once more. Give me just one more chance.”

Kruut resiliently tailed Sungchul. Once Sungchul boarded the boat, Kruut boarded his own shabby vessel in order to follow behind.

‘He’s becoming a bother.’

Sungchul had half a mind to just smash the boat, but he decided to keep the disturbances within the city to a minimum. There was nothing to be gained by attracting more attention.

The unwelcomed companionship continued before the voice of a young woman could be heard from one side.

“Old man! Just what are you doing?”

A woman wearing an apron was peeking her head out from a building floating on the water. It was the female baker from yesterday.

‘Was it Clarice?’

She had left a deep impression on him with her strength that suited a strongman, not someone of her slim stature. She nimbly tossed her body over to the old man’s boat. A loud splash was made as the boat rocked heavily.

“Where are you going now? I heard you failed this time as well!!?”

The old man could not say anything to her blunt words, instead, he simply hung his head in shame. Bertelgia giggled as though she was amused by this interaction.

It was at this moment that Clarice suddenly turned back to gaze in Sungchul’s direction. She politely greeted him once their eyes met.

“I am deeply sorry that my grandfather caused you such an inconvenience. I would be grateful if you could forgive him out of generosity.”

She appeared to be unruly, but she was actually a woman with a lot of grace. Her words also seemed quite rough, but she was still taking care of Kruut.

Sungchul wordlessly resumed rowing departing from where he was. The old man that had been tightly held by the woman followed him no longer.

Sungchul who had now entered the jungle once again following the path that the old man had taken: the waterway that continued

upstream to land. In this regard, Sungchul felt that Kruut's experience was not all that flawed as the river was the only fixed path within the jungle whose paths changed constantly.

Sungchul soon arrived at the point blocked off by trees at which the exploratory group had to turn back. The geography had shifted ever so slightly. The tree roots that had obstructed the river were slightly twisted.

‘Is this what they call the Tree Mother?’

Sungchul checked with his eye of truth for any hidden element to see if he had overlooked anything. No magic energies or special spells were detected, neither were the presence of any nearby spirits.

It was a tree that had lived for a time close to an eternity; a time that couldn't be estimated. Beings and objects that live that long gain a power onto itself in a way that's difficult for humans to perceive.

Sungchul sat at the head of his boat and observed the great tree with persistence. After the time it would've taken to drink one cup of tea had passed, he was able to come to a conclusion.

‘It's moving. It's almost imperceptible, but the locations of these trees are changing.’

The wall of trees obstructing the river was actually the roots of this one great tree. A portion of this tree that was so large as to make it difficult to discern which part it was had tangled together like vines to form this tree wall. The stalk that had blocked the river was sucking in the river water.

Two options came to mind. One was to wait, and another was to break through the roots of this massive tree. Sungchul didn't particularly like either option. The former required too much time, and the latter would potentially cause unnecessary conflict with the Lizardmen.

‘Is there any way to shorten the timeline?’

No particular idea came to mind. He had thought of submerging but quickly gave up on the idea. Even if he were to jump into this yellow tinted cloudy almost mud-like river, he would not be able to see an inch ahead of him. However, he felt that he would be trapped in the ever-changing jungle’s maze if he traveled by land.

As more time passed in contemplation, Sungchul could hear a beautiful melody in the distance. He hid his presence and headed toward the sound.

Five lizardmen were wandering around the jungle. The beautiful melody was coming from the wooden flute of the Lizardman at the lead. The same tree roots that had stopped Sungchul’s path now stood before them, but the roots reacted completely differently from when Sungchul had stood in front of it. The tree roots seemed to open a path for them as though the roots were sentient.

The Lizardmen leisurely walked through the path between the roots and the roots extended down once again to block the way as soon as they disappeared from view. It was a sight that was difficult to believe even as he saw it with his own eyes.

“It looks like it’s responding to the music?”

“I agree.”

It appeared as though the Tree Mother decided whether to open its path based on the music. However, how would he be able to obtain a method to play the music in his current state?

“...”

Sungchul could not draw, and he also couldn’t sing. He couldn’t perform any instruments, and the sole instrument he had handled in his lifetime was the recorder he was taught to play during music class in his elementary school years.

“Bertelgia,” called out Sungchul.

It was a softer voice filled with affection that was much different than usual. Bertelgia knew of the circumstances in which Sungchul used such a voice to call out to her very well.

“Uh.. hm? What’s wrong...?”

She responded in an innocent manner as though she hadn’t noticed anything.

“Pick out a song.”

“N-no way!”

“I’ll even clap along. Quickly now.”

Sungchul urged her on by making a clapping gesture.

“No way! I can’t sing!”

But Bertelgia’s resistance was much stronger than expected.

“....”

It couldn’t be helped.

Sungchul cleared his throat and began to sing with a powerful voice toward the tree roots blocking his path.

“On top of the rolling green field.... the picturesque house...”

The results were pitiful. The tree roots seemed to clamp up much tighter as though enraged before Sungchul could finish a single verse.

“...”

Sungchul turned the boat around without regrets.

—

It was easy enough to hire a singer or a performer, but it was practically impossible to find a performer willing to enter the jungle. Anyone living in Panchuria knew fully well how dangerous the forest was. A musician fairly advanced in age clicked his tongue as he spoke.

“Would millions of gold coins even be worth risking my life for? If you truly need a musician, learn the arts yourself.”

Sungchul spent the entire day on his feet with no results. He tried changing his methods as he went along and offered a large sum of money first to entice people, but every contract went bust once he proposed the part about entering the jungle. The few musicians that seemed interested required an exploratory group that was at least one of a size that Kruut had assembled.

Sungchul had begun to contemplate the foolish thought of trying his hand at learning an instrument himself as he headed toward the Emperor’s Outhouse. The familiar chaotic scene of the local bar greeted him.

Sungchul sat where the eyes of onlookers couldn’t reach him and began to down his drinks in an attempt to soothe his weary soul. Once his fatigue faded to a certain degree, he began to ask around about a musician willing to enter the jungle with him again. The reason he chose the local watering hole is that he had thought that a musician might be found even among the throngs of human trash who come everyday to get drunk.

Sungchul pushed a tip toward a staff before asking him to seek out a musician or someone that knew how to handle an instrument among these drunkards.

The staff, encouraged by the sudden influx of a substantial amount of cash, moved around diligently like a herding dog. Sungchul then rented a guest room on the third floor and waited for the potential applicants. Eventually, three drunkards were put before him in the room. They were all similarly shabby looking people reeking of alcohol.

“Please perform for me one at a time.”

The audition began, and the expectations were low. However, not a single person managed to overcome that low hurdle. Many who showed up didn’t even even do what they were supposed to.

“Is imitation also viable? I am confident that I can mimic a Lizardman! Shk! Sheee! One Mealworm Special here! Plenty of pepper fruit on top!”

“Get lost.”

Several more layabouts continued to come. Finally, a man with the words ‘rapist’ tattooed on top of his head who knew a bit of flute was somewhat willing to enter the jungle, but Sungchul didn’t approve of him. His performance was mediocre and, more than anything, Sungchul didn’t like his background.

Once Sungchul started hesitating, the rapist fell to his knees and spoke in a voice filled with earnesty. “I am living every single day in repentance for what I’ve done. I promise not to inflict harm on any other resident, so consider this an act of reforming a man and give me this one opportunity.”

“...”

Sungchul told him to wait for a decision for now and called for the next applicant. The next applicant was a familiar face he was fully acquainted with.

“Mr. Summoned!”

It was Kruut Asaam. He must have sold off the fancy clothing that he had worn when he led the exploratory team as he was knelt down before Sungchul in his old rags trying to kiss his hand.

Sungchul lightly pushed him aside and called out to the staff waiting outside.

“Here.”

He was about to immediately have him thrown out when Kruut, who had caught on, ran quickly to the door and locked it.

“You’re making this difficult.”

Sungchul allowed his anger to leak out for the first time. Kruut could feel a terror that made his body freeze over, but he grit his

teeth and barely managed to spit out his prepared speech.

“I heard you were looking for a musician.”

He managed to sound dignified once again.

“You’re telling me that you know how to handle an instrument?”

Kruut nodded at Sungchul’s question.

“Go ahead.”

“T-That is...”

The old man hesitated, and Sungchul let out a small sigh.

“I’m warning you. It is not a good idea to appear in front of me again.”

Sungchul spoke sincerely. He tried to avoid harming innocent bystanders, but he had no desire to let someone that was inconveniencing him repeatedly live.

“Clarice! My granddaughter can sing remarkably well.”

“Then bring her here.”

“That is a bit more complicated. As I said before, our relationship isn’t so good.”

“...”

“But I know where she is! I suspect that she should be singing to herself at the moment. Let us go together. If I’m wrong, you can strike me down or grind me up. I’ll accept my fate.”

Sungchul felt weary. He rose from his seat and opened the door before looking down the inn’s corridor. There were several layabouts who weren’t largely different from that rapist staggering about reeking of alcohol. Sungchul, who met eyes with one of them, spoke coldly to Kruut.

“Lead on.”

The place that Kruut had led him to was not on the water, it was a grand residence on the shore. There were roses of various colors blooming splendidly along the fence as beautiful music and a murmur of voices could be heard. He could see men and women in gaudy clothes sitting around several tables filled with scrumptious feast as he drew close. There was a banquet being held inside.

Sungchul could feel goosebumps crawling across his body. Socializing and banquets were two of the few things he hated most. One of the most difficult things he had to do during the time he had devoted himself to the Human Empire was attending these tiresome social gatherings. No matter how good a feast or the beauty of the gathered women, he felt sick revulsion every time he saw the disingenuous smile and the undeserving smug look of the ruling elites who were pretending to be important. This was a banquet in the backwater countryside that paled in comparison to the banquets of the Empire at the heart of the continent, but it was still unavoidable for Sungchul to feel a natural sense of aversion.

As he held in his nausea and continued toward the entrance, the burly servants noticed Sungchul's party and blocked his path.

"Suspicious looking people and those without invitations cannot enter."

Suspicious looking people was another word for people that looked poor. Sungchul was rather happy about this turn of events.

As they loitered about the entrance, Kruut pointed a finger into the banquet.

"There, that's my granddaughter!"

Sungchul looked toward where his finger was pointing at. Clarice was stepping onto the stage amidst the indifference of the crowd. The sole person showing interest was a mischievous kid lingering at the side throwing crumbs at her.

Clarice withstood the indifference and began to sing along with

the performance of the band.

“Wow!” said Bertelgia as she let out a low exclamation, while Sungchul’s eyes shone as he watched with interest.

Chapter 119 – Ruins (3)

“I’m not going. I won’t go. I would never step foot in that place unless I went mad.”

It was an obvious conclusion; Clarise adamantly refused Sungchul’s proposal. Kruut tried to convince her in his stead.

“Clarise. This will be the last opportunity. I’ll never go to the jungle again, so please just once. Just once, accompany us.”

Clarise had a slight change of heart by Kruut’s urging, but it wasn’t enough to fully bring her on board.

“Ey, Clarise. It’s time for your next song.”

A fellow band member was waiting for Clarise with an impatient look on his face as he consulted his watch. Clarise lightly walked towards the banquet hall once again. Soon the sound of music could be heard and the beautiful melodies spread across over the river in the night sky.

“She has a beautiful voice.”

It was rare for Sungchul to give a word of praise to others, but her audience at the banquet didn’t seem to agree with him. As the song was reaching its peak, a drunk aristocrat who had been laughing and talking aloud hurled a glass cup onto the stage.

“Hey! Shut up!”

It was some middle-aged pot-bellied man with sideburns that hung at a length on each side.

“What’s with your terrible singing? Get rid of her right now!” He pointed his fingers as he shouted profanities.

Several aristocrats of this backwater countryside saw the spectacle and snickered. Clarise and the musicians stopped the music as if they were used to this kind of situation and tactfully waited for further instructions from the man. The man with the

sideburns looked over at Clarise with a longing gaze and shouted with a smug smile on his face.

“Miss Clarise! Why haven’t you worn the clothes I’ve gifted you? It’s a special stage costume that I’ve spent a fortune on when I purchased it at LaGrange!”

“Why... that bastard...”

Kruut’s face grew red with anger as he watched on.

“How could that bastard do such a thing to my granddaughter.”

Kruut stepped forward.

“Where are you going?” asked Sungchul.

Kruut answered him without stopping.

“I cannot stand by and watch that man who used to serve as a manservant in our household lay his hand on my granddaughter.”

He walked towards the entrance of the banquet hall, but the burly men obstructed his path. Kruut forcefully pushed them aside and entered.

“Shove off! I said shove off! I just have something to say.”

He was making another scene at the entrance. The music stopped, and the attention of the aristocrats turned toward the entrance. The man who had thrown the cup toward Clarise and mocked was also among them. The man who had grown his sideburns to a notable length recognized Kruut’s face and roared with laughter.

“Look who it is. Isn’t it the great explorer, Mr. Kruut Asaam? I’ve heard that you went to the jungle once again, but why are you back already? Did your venture fail again?”

He glanced about at the people around him as he spoke and they all broke out in laughter.

“Garehs Ale! You who came from generations of servants of our

family sure act big just because you made some money!”

The smile on Sideburn’s face disappeared as he heard the word ‘servant’.

“That was the case before, but that is not the case any longer. Don’t forget that. I have elevated my family name while you have brought yours to ruin, and I am now enjoying the rewards of my achievements, while you are facing the consequences of your actions. If it wasn’t for the Curse of Extinction, I would have subjected your family to generations of servitude for mine. What a shame.”

His words were detestable, but looking past how it was stated, he was absolutely right. Unfortunately, truth drives people mad.

“Garehs! You bastard!”

Kruut broke past the bouncers and leaped toward Garehs, but the bouncers following behind managed to get a hold of him. After receiving a thorough beating he was thrown out. Once Clarise was done with her performance, she hastily ran over to check his condition.

Her face appeared to be full of anger at first, but once she saw Kruut’s messily beaten face, her anger faded away only to be replaced by a look of worry as she checked his condition.

“Gramps, are you ok?”

“Uuuh... I’m sorry. Clarise.”

Tears flowed down Kruut’s face making him appear even more pathetic. They were tears of anger, regret, and extreme pain.

“I... I have ruined you. If things were as before, you would have been making your name known at La Grange Music Academy. All of this was wrought from my greed...”

“What are you talking about? Gramps. No... it actually does piss me off now that I hear it. If it weren’t for gramps...”

Clarise's fist trembled. It was at this moment that Sungchul appeared before the duo.

“....”

Clarise looked toward him.

“Wait, you. You just watched as Gramps was getting beaten, right? How does a person have such little sympathy...”

‘Boom’

A box dropped in front of Clarise marked with the seal of the Merchant Coalition. Golden lights that brightly illuminated the surrounding poured out once the seal was broken and the box was opened. Clarise and Kruut's eyes were dyed in this golden light.

“Is this enough?”

Sungchul asked in a calm tone.

—

There were four people on board the boat heading toward the jungle. Kruut and his granddaughter took their place at the stern while gazing at both riverbanks with apprehensive looks. The burly man called Light with “Rapist” tattooed across his forehead stared only at Clarise while sitting at the bow of the ship with his back turned against the water.

“Huhuhu...”

Sungchul stood at the rearmost part of the ship holding the wheel, watching the scene unfolding on the deck with apathy.

“Ey.”

Sungchul called out to Light. Sungchul's voice did not register in Light's ears.

‘Mmm... Is he just one of the people from the Emperor's Outhouse?’

Sungchul had chosen him with the prior knowledge that he was a

rotten apple, but Sungchul didn't quite realize how rotten the apple was. To make matters worse, Light abruptly stood up and blew hard into the whistle that was hanging around his neck as soon as they left the city boundaries.

Several small boats hiding in the reeds diligently rowed their way over.

"There's a rumor that the Summoned bastard is rich. Kill 'em all!"

He let loose a haughty laughter while revealing an axe.

"Kuhahaha! A human does not easily change! Did you really think I'd mend my ways? That woman is mine, so no one touches her!"

A brief moment passed, and there were bandit corpses floating around the boat. The boat carrying the bandits was smoldering in flames as it gradually sank into the muddy water. The man with the tattoo on his forehead was now kneeling in front of Sungchul.

"I have finally come to discover the true beauty of my inner self, and I have found the strength to forcefully stand against my wicked heart. That's correct. I have been reborn having met you, and have been able to achieve the true meaning in turning over a new leaf. I beg thee, if you could find it in your heart to show mercy to a lost soul like me just one more time..."

The rapist meekly spoke about his reformation to Sungchul, and Sungchul kept him alive for the moment. He still had his uses.

The ones surprised the most by this turn of events were Kruut Asaam and his granddaughter. They couldn't close their slacked jaw at the overwhelming power that Sungchul had displayed. Something flashed and whizzed by, and all the countless murdering bandits were killed.

"Gramps... just who is that man?"

"I... I'm not sure... maybe a m-mage?"

Kruut had no way to know that the man that had hired him was the most famous figure in this world.

Sungchul's boat finally arrived at the river's end obstructed by the Tree Mother amidst chaos.

“Play.”

Sungchul curtly spoke to the rapist that he had spared.

“Hey, can I come out?”

A female voice rang out from Sungchul's pocket. Sungchul nodded, and when he did, a small book floated out from his pocket and expanded with a loud poof in the air. The flying book, Bertelgia, had made her appearance.

Bertelgia fluttered as she flew over toward Clarise and orbited around her.

“Hii-ii!”

Clarise nearly jumped ship in that moment, but Kruut held onto her.

“Hey, pretty lady. You sure know your way around a song. Not that you can sing as well as me.”

“T-the book is talking...!”

The sound of a flute could be heard coming from the front at this time. The rapist, Light, was blowing a flute that looked like a recorder with trembling hands making ‘pii’ sounds. But his subpar musical ability must have been insufficient in impressing the Tree Mother. She seemed to tremble slightly, but soon became rigid and still like a solid wall.

“...”

Sungchul's shadow loomed over the rapist's face.

“Ah... I poured my reformed heart into it... but it doesn't seem to be going well. I'll try again with my reformed heart...”

The man played his flute once again, but the results were the same. Sungchul pulled out the rope he frequently used from his Soul Storage and looped it around Light's neck. His whistle got in the way.

Sungchul tore away the whistle around his neck and looped the rope around the neck once again.

“U...uwaaaaah!!!”

Light's scream rang out across the overgrown foliage. His cry of pain must have impressed the Tree Mother more than his flute playing because a greater number of roots were now moving about.

Sungchul approached Kruut and Clarise leaving the hung corpse with its tongue sticking out in the background.

“Now, your turn.”

“...”

Clarise swallowed deeply and stood at the head of the boat. Her heart pounded intensely, but after taking a deep breath twice as she usually did she regained her composure. Her experiences of standing on the stage hundreds of times helped her calm down out of habit. There might be no audience, lighting, or the accompaniment of a band, but she opened her lips toward the myriad of roots standing in her way and began to sing.

“... finding the courage to move forward in the face of unparalleled beauty. The light of the two suns grow dim but brighten once more.”

The mumbling and low first verse of the song finished and each subsequent verses became stronger and more melodic as they stirred the air. The indifferent trees slowly began to quiver, and Sungchul witnessed the magical scene of the tree roots that began to part like water before stone thanks to the only source of beautiful music in the great jungles which was otherwise shrouded in a veil of silence and stillness.

‘As expected.’

The path had opened. The original path of the river that had been hidden by the infinitely expanding tree roots had unfolded before Sungchul. Sungchul confirmed the scenery around him by the map made of Goblin hide. Rock in the shape of a sharp blade, white monkeys sitting on a large tree, and the hot spring spewing orange colored water. Despite searching all this time, the landmarks that had never once revealed themselves were now being revealed so naturally in rapid succession.

“This is it. This is it!”

The one most excited was Kruut.

“It must have been the eighth expedition. One of the mercenaries played the flute to keep his boredom at bay. It looks like the path had opened then because of him.”

The wall of trees that had blocked their path was now gone. Sungchul noticed something as Clarise’s song came to an end. There was a sharp spire shooting out of the overgrown hell of green shining in the distance.

‘Is that it?’

Kruut spoke up in that moment as he looked around with concern.

“If we go a bit further, we’ll hear a strange sound.”

“A strange sound?”

“It’s some strange mechanical sound I’ve never heard before. The mercenaries heard that sound and fled while screaming about some monster that crawled out of the afterlife or perhaps a great devil in hiding.”

Sungchul soon heard the sound as well. There was an irregular sound of impact echoing from beyond the vines and bushes. It resembled the sound of metal striking metal, but it also resembled

the sound of a heavy mortar being struck down repeatedly. The strange unidentifiable noise grew closer and more aggressive as they pressed on.

Clarise rolled up her sleeves and stood in front of Kruut protectively. Her hand held the axe left behind by the rapist. The axe's handle had the words "Anniversary of the Day of Release from Prison. With a fresh heart!" etched onto it.

Cowardly Bertelgia took refuge as always within Sungchul's pocket, but as they drew closer and the sound grew clearer, she furtively poked out from his pocket.

"Hm? This sound. It feels familiar and nostalgic?"

Sungchul held no expression on his face as he continued to row forward. His group was soon faced with the identity of the sound.

'Crunch'

A massive tree fell, and a spinning saw blade could be seen beyond it. Its owner was a golem made of stone and iron. It was about five meters tall, and its two gem-encrusted red eyes gleamed while its moss-covered torso made of white granite was terrifyingly stained with blood-like rust which had leaked out from the rusty iron.

"Hm? That's a standard combat golem. Papa made that!"

Bertelgia flew out of the pocket and flew over to the golem.

"Hey! It's me. Me! Don't you recognize me?"

A spinning sawblade moved toward her in the next moment.

"Hey...?!"

But at the last second, there was a refreshing sound of impact before something dark wrapped itself around the spinning saw blade. It was the Demonic Weapon Cassandra.

"Come here, Bertelgia."

As she quickly retreated toward Sungchul's direction, Cassandra was drawn tight.

“Guuwaaaa...”

When the golem tilted its head, its bulky body looked like it was being lifted up into the air before it was then discarded into the river. It was a monstrous strength that was difficult to believe even upon witnessing it.

“....”

Sungchul waited for the bubbles rising to the muddy waters to calm before rowing the boat once again. Kruut and Clarise only stared at Sungchul's face with dumbfounded expressions on their faces.

Kruut managed to gather up some courage after a while to broach the topic.

“W-who are you?”

Sungchul did not respond. He silently continued to row the boat.

Eventually, an ominous sound could be heard in the distance from the jungle. More golems. Sungchul briefly spoke to Kruut and Clarise.

“Please wait a bit. It shouldn't take long.”

Sungchul said as such and lightly leaped over to the source of the sound clearing away the bushes in his path as he went. He noticed the mark of the Lizardmen placed here and there, but he gave it no importance. It didn't take long for Sungchul to discover the other golem.

His eyebrows shook when he saw the golem. It had a spinning saw blade attached to one of its arm, similar to the golem before, but the problem was what was attached to the other arm. There was a blue gemstone similar to the one held by Sungchul embedded into the other arm that was emitting a bright and clear light, and

there were countless small animals lying dead around its feet. They were Carbuncles.

“My world... How could you?”

Bertelgia was in horror.

“...”

Sungchul immediately pulled out Fal Garaz and swung toward the golem, and the combat golem struck by this single blow broke apart where it stood.

“Wait! I need to have a look at the golem.”

Bertelgia flew out of her pocket and headed toward the remains of the broken golem. She headed toward the golem’s shining core beyond the granite fragments. After the time to drink one cup of tea had passed, she spoke with a voice filled with assurance.

“This was modified recently!”

“...”

“Someone had woken these golems recently and commanded them to commit these horrible acts.”

“There are people that are capable of doing such a thing?”

Sungchul asked the obvious question.

“Only papa could... but that’s impossible!”

“Could it be anyone else that lived in that era? Maybe the Seven Heroes?”

Sungchul asked again while vigilantly looking around the vicinity.

“I-I’m not so sure about that. Papa knew them and went on a few adventures with them, but... no, he might have told them enough to modify the golems. It’s not particularly difficult.”

“Then there is only one answer.”

Sungchul's eyes lit up fiercely.

‘Sajators.’

Chapter 120 – Ruins (4)

The flippant laughter still remained fresh in his memory. Sungchul focused his hearing to the sound ringing out from deeper in the jungle. The sound of another golem activating could be heard from a faraway place. He immediately ran over to that place to discover another golem massacring Carbuncles.

“Just why are they doing this...?”

Bertelgia muttered to herself as she looked over the Carbuncle corpses.

“It looks as though there is a relation between Multicasting and Carbuncles.”

Sajators’ childish plans were clear. He had intended to destroy all evidence so that he wouldn’t have to hand over Multicasting. Ironically, this might have presented an opportunity for Sungchul as if he happened to meet Sajators in this place, he would be able to end it here.

After Sungchul got rid of two more golems, he headed toward the boat Kruut was waiting in.

“W-where did you come from? I heard some massive sounds.”

“... The situation is worse than I thought, but if we do as I say, you’ll be able to get back to Panchuria safely.”

Sungchul rowed the oars to move forward. The spire poking out between the trees drew closer, and soon the signs of a ruin appeared past the flowing waters. It was a ruined marina made of stacked stone and etched with the trace of an eternal passage of time. The rope to tie off the boat had already rotted away, but the post to tie the rope remained. Sungchul pulled out his rope and securely fastened the boat before he stepped onto the wharf and looking at his surroundings.

The area around the wharf was different from the other areas in that it was plunged into a deathly silence.

“It might be good to just wait here.”

Sungchul picked up the whistle left on the boat; It was the whistle used by the rapist to call his buddies. He then handed it to Clarise.

“If something happens, use this.”

These were people that Sungchul had brought out of necessity. Sungchul did not make a habit of discarding people under his protection. If he did, he'd be no different than the elite few that he detested so much. However, there was an exception.

“I would suggest that you don't do anything unnecessary.”

Sungchul glared at Kruut so as to emphasize this point. Kruut opened his eyes wide and gave a nod.

Sungchul left the old man and his granddaughter behind and headed forward. He used the towering spire as a landmark to navigate through the thick foliage when he discovered something so spectacular that it made him doubt his eyes. There was a well preserved stepped pyramid sitting in the middle of the jungle. Not a single vine or blade of grass was able to penetrate inside of this relic. It was practically impossible for something to be maintained this perfectly within the great jungle that was bursting and squirming with life.

“Looks like this is the place.”

The destination marked on the map made of goblin leather was simply denoted with an X, but it was difficult to imagine that it could denote any other location other than this.

Sungchul activated the Eye of Truth and scanned the surroundings. There were no magical techniques being employed here in particular, but the question of how this relic was maintained to such a pristine state became even more glaring.

Fortunately, that question was soon answered.

There was a single golem moving in the distance. This golem was different than the other combat golems he had faced thus far as it was human-sized with shorter legs, torso, and arms giving off an almost cute image. It used its short arms to diligently check and clean between the relic for sprouting grass, branches that grew too close, or fallen leaves and such. In other words, this golem was the groundskeeper of this relic.

The golem didn't show any response to Sungchul even as he approached. Rather, he grabbed the weed that had been growing underneath Sungchul's foot, uprooted it with his short and stubby hand and threw it away before hurrying off.

"That looks to be made by Papa as well. Papa was the only one that could make such a miniature golem."

"Your father, just what kind of person was he? Wasn't he an alchemist?"

"Yep, correct. An alchemist. He only made alchemic items to sell when I was very young, but when that day approached, he mostly made golems instead. The merfolk from the sea were threatening the world, you see."

"Merfolk? Were they part of the Calamity?"

Bertelgia nodded at Sungchul's question, but there were no records in the Scripture of Calamity about any Calamity relating to the merfolk living at the ocean floor.

'After wrapping up the situation here, I'll have to head directly to the Tower of Seclusion.'

Sungchul put the small golem behind him as he walked toward the pyramid's entrance. The pyramid inside was shrouded in a thick darkness and silence that suited it.

Stomp.

The sound of his footstep bounced off the walls to echo long into the distance. The corridor seemed to extend quite far ahead. Sungchul lit up the torch he pulled out from his Soul Storage and headed inside. The moment he stepped foot into the darkness, bright letters appeared in front of his eyes.

[You've cleverly managed to find this place. I welcome you in the name of Sajators.]

As the words faded away, the corridor that was shrouded in darkness began to reveal itself from a distance. The lanterns on the upper half of the corridor lit up all at once.

After the lanterns were lit, a mural on the wall of the corridor that appeared to be drawn in the distant past could be seen. It was difficult to tell what its original form was as much time had passed and the dye it was drawn with had long since degraded.

Sungchul slowly walked alongside and gazed at the drawing. It depicted humans and beasts being chased by the demons and humans that appeared like fish. The faces of the humans were generally filled with fear while the Devils and the Merfolk were indifferent overall. Above the mural were ancient words that were difficult to decipher as they were peeling away from here and there. Sungchul tried to read what he could.

'Coming... They... hard... to stop... help!... help!'

The rough translation of the text seemed to depict the terror of the Calamity.

Sungchul walked a bit closer, and another text appeared in his sight.

[By the time you're looking at these words, we'll either be dead or have become heroes that have saved the world.]

[However, we might also be something that doesn't fall into either category as humans are ungrateful beings. Captain still maintains faith within the humans, but Vestiare and Ga Xi Ong do

not share the same sentiment.]

[I am on the fence for now, but... how will it all turn out?]

Sungchul could roughly determine when this relic was first created after reading this text. After leaving his mark within the Summoning Palace, Sajators must have come to this place. It was before the final battle with the world at stake; before the Seven Heroes fell into Calamity.

Sungchul continued to walk forward. The mural's condition was better preserved as he walked further, and he soon discovered an interesting image. The race with the wings and beaks of birds. The Avians. The ancient text had something recorded about them. Sungchul translated that bit with his poor deciphering ability.

‘Sky... danger... ancient god... subservient... dripping... king... help!’

Sungchul felt strange about reading this portion. Devil. Merfolk. Avian. The three calamities had appeared within the era of the Seven Heroes. However, the content of the Calamity then was different than the advent of the current Calamity. The Calamity within Sungchul's era was as follows: Devil, Seven Heroes, War.

Leaving the seven heroes aside, the other two Calamities that had appeared within their era was not within his own.

‘Can the content of the Calamity change?’

It was a possibility that he hadn't considered... no, he couldn't even imagine until now as the Calamity worked according to the will of god as it was reflected on the Scripture of Calamity. It was not something that could be decided by human will, and those who were at the receiving end of it had to receive it at face value.

Sungchul proposed a question to Bertelgia.

“What were the contents of the Calamity within your time?”

It was the first time he had asked the question.

“The only thing I remember was the last one which was the Calamity of the Merfolk. After that, I fell into a deep sleep due to some circumstances. My body wasn’t in the best condition.”

Bertelgia’s voice had a bit of resentment mixed with it as she answered.

“...”

Sungchul continued to walk forward and a wide hall occupied by stone tables appeared. There were scrolls made of papyrus on top of the tables, but they scattered into dust as soon as they were touched.

‘I can’t use this.’

Sungchul continued forward, and when he did, another text blocked his sight.

[Multicasting was my own secret technique that I happened to develop through a fortunate opportunity.]

[There are countless Carbuncles living within the jungle of the Screaming Knife’s Edge mountain range. Carbuncles are common enough within the entirety of the continent, but here in the jungle you can meet quite an intelligent one that can’t be seen anywhere else.]

Sajators’ message here was definitely intended for someone who would find it in the future. There were no hostile traps nor the test that were so frequent. It might have been because all the tests required for the Multicasting was already performed in the Summoning Palace.

The path branched off as he passed by the hall.

[There is nothing to lose whether you go left or right as you’ll be able to find a message left behind by an amusing friend.]

Sungchul turned left. His pace was visibly faster than before.

Another hall appeared. In the middle of this hall, there stood a

massive slab of stone with an image of a single animal drawn by the artist with great care. It was a Carbuncle, but it looked different from the regular ones. Its fur had a white tint and its gemstone in its forehead had a blue light like the blue gemstone.

[The one before you is the one that holds the secret to Multicasting.]

[The bugger's name is King Carbuncle and don't mock the name as I have thought it up myself. The most important part of this is that the beast can read the thoughts of every living being its body touches.]

[Think on it well. What it means to make a familiar out of a being that can read your mind and cast magic.]

The text continued.

[The blue gemstone ring earned from the Summoning Palace has the power to draw all Carbuncles.]

[When the sun rises, stand on top of the pyramid's spire and shine the light of the ring with the blue gemstone.]

[All the Carbuncles within the forest will gather once you do.]

There was a jewel that shined like a crystal beneath the picture. Bertelgia who noticed it opened her mouth to speak.

“That looks like the Golem Core made by papa?”

Sungchul held the jewel in his hand. It didn't seem to hold any particular magical properties. Instead, another set of words appeared.

[Taming the King Carbuncle is the ideal method, but a capable necromancer should be able to extract its soul and seal it within the soul stone below to use the beast like a tool.]

[But remember this; if you take a Soul stone without winning over the King Carbuncle's heart, then it could become as useless as those pebbles found lying around outside.]

Sungchul inspected the jewel in his hand. It appeared plain, but it held an unusual power.

‘A soul stone.’

It was a technique that did not survive to the present day. The technique of extracting and imbuing the soul was that of a Devil’s. Not only was it strictly forbidden in the present day mortal world, but it was also a technique long extinct that could not be passed down anymore. In any case, there was no more text. It looked like Sajators’ message had come to an end.

‘Sajators. I suppose you weren’t a complete bastard during this time.’

Even though was full of mischief, he was still relaying his own ancient technique in a concise and friendly manner for those who would come after him. Those who have climbed to a certain level tended to speak vaguely about some breakthroughs and talk about pedantic sophistry, but Sajators’ attitude was much more friendly and accommodating in comparison.

Once Sungchul left the room, he returned to the fork in the path. Sungchul headed to the right path this time. He passed by several murals until a small room appeared in the dark. Compared to Sajators’ room with the mural, it was a small room more comparable to a closet. Something stood in the center of the room; oppressively taking up the small space.

Sungchul’s torch illuminated it. It looked like something similar to a golem.

“Hm? I think I saw this before somewhere.”

Bertelgia piped up. When Sungchul approached the golem, text readily appeared before his eyes as though this situation was expected.

[How do you feel? What emotions does this Final Combat Unit to End the Calamity created by the Great Genius, Eighth Hero

wrought within you?]

Curiosity flashed within Sungchul's eyes.

'It was Eckheart. The man he referred to as an interesting friend.'

The text continued.

[This Final Combat Unit to End the Calamity's form was created in haste, so don't judge it too harshly on appearances. My ambition is to create Bertegia Unit 1, the largest single golem ever created; a final combat unit designed to stop the Calamities.]

[This colossus will be able to repel all Calamities that threatens us...]

As the message was being dictated, the pyramid began to greatly shake.

Boom!

It seemed as though some great impact was being caused onto the exterior.

'Is it a quake? No, this is...'

Sungchul began to glare.

At the same time, the sound of a whistle was sharply echoing throughout the jungle. Clarise's terror-filled eyes were locked on the sky above the pyramid. A man with a small frame surrounded by some magical formation was floating about the area above the pyramid like a god of death.

"Hahahaha! Are you some fucking vagrant? You've come all this way because I put out some crumbs? This will be your grave!"

Sajators of the Seven Heroes. The Multicast Magician had made his appearance in the jungle.

Chapter 121 – Sajators (1)

An unforgiving bombardment of magic landed on the pyramid. One blow after another, each strike contained destructive power as if conveying the wrath of god itself. Cracks began to form around the pyramid and it began to collapse.

Sajators made a satisfied smile as he watched the cloud of dust rise towards him and cover the surroundings. A magic formation appeared beside him at this point revealing a small girl in its place. The girl had the figure of a miniaturized version of Vestiare of the Seven Heroes. The small child looked at Sajators with intelligent eyes as she spoke with a clever tongue.

“Lord Sajators. You cannot act in this manner. Didn’t our captain give the order to avoid direct contact with the Demolisher?”

“So annoying. Is there any way I’d lose to that sort of Summoned? Huh? Look at it. The idiot’s grave.”

The dust slowly settled and revealed the messy ruins of the collapsed structure. There didn’t look to be anyone that survived within this pyramid that once had been maintained in its pristine state; now destroyed to the point where its original form could not be determined.

“Look. This is the power of the Multicast Magician Sajators!”

The white gemstones lining the inside of his robe gleamed suddenly. Each stone was illuminated by a strange seemingly living and dancing light, and a magic formation appeared above one of them.

The little Vestiare looked at the ruins dumbly before replying to Sajators with spite.

“Do you think the Demolisher would die to something like this?”

“What?”

Sajators' expression became twisted.

“He is one that stood before god, and through some method different than ours. I do not believe an attack of this caliber will be able to kill him.”

“If he's not dead then why do you think he hasn't come out yet? Is it because the rubble is too heavy for him? Well, what can I say? It'll take more than a hundred years to be able to dig himself out of this one.”

“And if he does manage to come out alive? You are someone that is more important than you yourself realize. Remember that.”

“Even if he does manage to crawl out of this one, he won't be able to catch me. You should know that no one can catch me if I put my mind to running. I am the Multicast Magician, Sajators.”

Sajators continued to brag, but the little Vestiare did not bat an eye. Instead, she chose to move on to the next topic.

“Captain has made an order. Immediately activate the next giant. The preparations at the next location are already...”

The miniaturized girl who had been with speaking intelligence was cut off suddenly. Sajators' hand, or more accurately a massive phantom of a demonic hand that sprouted from his hand, had grabbed the entirety of her tiny body.

“Don't get ahead of yourself, Vestiare! Captain may have given you importance because you know how to do some tricks, but remember this, the greatest magician among the Seven Heroes is me, Sajators.”

More strength poured into the hand that gripped the tiny body of Vestiare. Crunch. Crunch. The miniature figure began to deform into a grotesque shape. But in spite of it all, the child did not so much as change her expression and continued to speak in her distinct all-knowing voice.

“You can play First Place all you want. I don't care either way,

but don't forget to activate the giant. Captain's orders..."

The tiny figure was destroyed entirely. Sajators spat as he put his hand down. His hand that had appeared like a phantasm disappeared as it tossed her meaty remains below. The wind lifted Sajators' mantle revealing the jewels strung along beneath it. Two of the six gems were already lit with active magic formations glowing on top of them, one of which soon faded.

"Fucking... Wasted my good mood."

Sajators looked down toward the ground below and swiftly waved his hand.

"Inferno."

A massive flame rose up from rubble of the pyramid, and he poured some combustible liquid with a repulsive smell from the air with a bucket at various parts of the pyramid. Soon fearsome flames comparable to the flames of hell flared up from the pyramid along with some black smoke.

"..."

Sajators quietly looked at the flames with passionless eyes while flying when he heard some noise below to the east. It was the sound of a whistle.

"Hm? A human in a place like this?"

Along the riverside with running mudwater, an old man and a young woman were sitting on the docks. A cruel light flashed across Sajators' eyes.

"Should I go recharge some of my magic power?"

Sajators lightly descended toward the ground and landed before Clarise who blew upon the whistle that much harder in contrast with the sudden appearance of the monster.

"Clarise!"

It was only after Kruut gave warning from the back that the

sound of the whistle stopped.

“You look like a normal human now that I get a good look at you. How did you arrive here?”

Sajators spoke with a soft voice, but Clarise’s group could feel it; the unending evil reeking from this stranger.

When the group did not answer, Sajators lifted his hand slightly. A massive demonic hand rose like a phantom before him. The demonic hand seemed to mimic his movements as Sajators closed and opened his hand.

“Mmm. Now that I think about it, it might be better to leave one alive. That idiot will let the world know of my name once again if I did that.”

The demonic hand disappeared. Sajators glared at Kruut Assam as he tossed out a question.

“What is your relationship with each other?”

In that instant, Sajators’ eyes were dyed yellow. Kruut who was faced with that golden eye squarely in the face could feel his hair drain of color and found himself unable to defy the youthful magician. Kruut involuntarily answered the question.

“Clarise... is my Granddaughter.”

“Oh ho? Blood related? That is good.”

Sajators had a mischievous smile on his face. He soon noticed that Clarise was armed with an axe, so he took out a single sword from his Soul Storage and tossed it over to Kruut.”

“Receive it, and fight.”

“What...?”

Kruut who had received the sword made a dumbfounded expression and hesitated causing Sajators to fly up into the air and shout with a whimsical voice.

“I said fight! Both of you. Until one of you falls. The one who survives shall be given permission to live. If either of you does something like hesitate or try to spare the other, you shall end up like this.”

Sajators lifted his hand and pointed toward the north. A magical formation rose around his body, and there was an explosion powerful enough to shake the earth. When the explosion ended, the dense forest that was once overgrown was left with only a mound of dirt in its place.

As Clarise and Kruut looked back at him with fearful eyes, the smile upon Sajators face grew wider.

“I am the Multicast Magician, Sajators. The greatest magician among the Seven Heroes. I have been rebirthed in this world to suck the life out of humanity! Someone like this is giving you the opportunity to live. How generous am I? So, hurry up and fight, grandfather and granddaughter!”

Sajators viciously goaded them to fight. Clarise’s eyes shook restlessly while Kruut’s eyes were calm like the surface of a lake.

‘I thought my luck was unusually good of late.’

The spire of the ruins that he had sought for all his life was now buried under the collapsed jungle by the magician named Sajators.

‘If I knew this was going to happen, I should have trailed that Summoned in secret. I wouldn’t have had any regrets if I had died after witnessing the ruins.’

Kruut lifted his sword.

“Clarise.”

He walked toward Clarise with his sword in the air.

“Gramps.”

Clarise shook her head, but Kruut didn’t stop. Instead, he whispered to his granddaughter at a volume at which Sajators

would not be able to overhear.

“Pretend the fight for now, we’ll find a way later.”

Clarise immediately understood his intentions and lightly nodded, but Kruut’s body moved on its own. To be exact, the sword he held in his hand moved on its own.

“W-what?!”

Kruut’s eyes became wide. He tried to put the sword down, but his arms refused to listen. It felt as if everything below his shoulder to the hand that held the sword was not his own.

A flippant laughter exploded from behind them.

“Kyahahahaha! Dumb old man, do you think I wouldn’t be able to know of your stupid schemes? The sword you hold is cursed. It won’t stop until your opponent is dead!”

Sajators laughed to his content before reclining sideways in the air while observing Kruut and Clarise down below.

“Hey, hurry up and start. I want to witness a tragedy one can’t watch with dry eyes.”

Kruut’s arms moved on its own and mysterious ancient letters appeared on the otherwise unsuspecting surface of the blade. Kruut who understood a bit of the Ancient Language could decipher some of its content.

[I shall not stop until the thirst for blood had been sated.]

“This is wrong.”

Kruut let out a shout that was more closer to a scream.

“This is wrong! I don’t care what happens to me, but spare my granddaughter!”

Sajators who saw Kruut’s state began to laugh mockingly while holding his stomach.

“What did you say? I can’t hear you. Why don’t you try shouting

a bit louder, old fart.”

The sword that was now dyed red continued to strike toward Clarise on its own. Kruut continued to scream. it was because the strike which exceeded the strength of his body gave him pain equal to having his shoulders pulled out.

“Kwaaak!”

The evil blade of magic continued to pierce at Clarise’s heart. She managed to parry it away for a while by lifting up her axe blocking the first round of attacks, but the power behind the sword was tremendous. The axe blade rang like a bell and trembled, and her arms that she believed were well trained felt numb as though they were paralyzed. It wasn’t Kruut’s strength. It was strength held within the magical blade itself.

In truth, the rough movements of the blade were destroying Kruut physically while using his shoulders as its fulcrum.

CRUNCH. CRUNCH.

Whenever the sword moved on its own, the uncomfortable sound of bone grinding against bone from Kruut’s skinny arm could be heard along with Kruut’s screams.

‘Both gramps and I will die at this rate.’

The magical sword lunged toward Clarise once again, but this time, its movements were different. Not only was it fast, but it was extraordinary enough to leave an afterimage. Clarise desperately moved her eyes to seek out the path of the sword, but it was impossible with her level of skill.

“End it.”

Sajators spoke coldly as though he had lost all interest, the sword began to strike toward Clarise once again. Clarise looked upon Kruut’s face that was distorted with pain and surprise and smiled wide.

“Gramps. You know, I haven’t really changed my family name.”

It was in that moment. Something akin to a black light quickly shot out from the dense jungle and wrapped around the magical sword. The magical sword thrashed about, trying to free itself from the black something that bound it, but it was struck by a hammer that followed and shattered it to pieces.

BOOM

A single hammer embedded itself to the ground, and only one thing came to the minds of everyone that recognized it. It was the hammer forged from the sky itself, Fal Garaz.

“Huh?”

Sajators, who was in the sky above, raised his eyebrows. A single man appeared from the jungle with a book that flew in the air accompanying him. There was not a single injury nor speck of dust on him.

“I’m sorry I was late. I would’ve come a bit faster if you had blown the whistle.”

“I was blowing it since a while back!”

Clarise protested as she raised her axe.

Sungchul walked over to Fal Garaz and retrieved his weapon before he grabbed the shoulder of Kruut, who was groaning in pain, and lightly pushed it in.

CRUNCH.

“Kwaak!”

Kruut’s body curved like a bow. Clarise lifted her axe and ran toward Sungchul.

“What are you doing?”

“Clarise, stop. This man was just fixing my dislocated shoulder.”

Sajators simply watched the scene unfold below him with an

unpleasant expression on his face.

‘The bastard... he’s unscathed?’

In truth, this was a heavy blow to him. Even if he hadn’t directly targeted Sungchul with his assault, he was confident that it should have delivered some level of impact. Didn’t he also burn down everything in that vicinity as insurance as well? However, the fact that Sungchul appeared without a single injury to his body or even his clothes was enough to make him deeply uncomfortable.

He also felt wary. He had come to realize that Sungchul was definitely much stronger than he had expected and that he could be defeated here if he was careless.

‘It might be better if I slip away from this place for now.’

Sajators quickly changed his mind about engaging him, but he still had no intention of leaving empty-handed. He wanted to at least sucker punch Sungchul before leaving. It was with these thoughts that Sajators dug through his mantle with his hand. Different patterns of magical formation rose from each gem glowing with a milky light which were hung in a row under his mantle.

‘I’ll show you the might of the Multicast Magician.’

However, Sungchul disappeared from his sight in the next moment. He then felt a chilling aura of hostility from behind. Sajators immediately summoned the demonic hand to protect his rear as he glared with his eyes. Fal Garaz was flying toward him.

He tried to use the demonic hand to stop the hammer, but the moment the hand came into contact with the hammer, Sajators knew. That the man who was after his life was not a man that could be stopped.

“Kwaaaak!”

The demonic hand shattered and Sajators shot toward the earth like a cannon before being lodged into the jungle below. Sungchul

who now lightly hopped over let out a shallow sigh before landing toward where Sajators had crashed. He looked down toward the ground without any expression before fixing his grip on Fal Garaz.

‘Quite easy.’

Chapter 122 – Sajators (2)

He had let his guard down a little too much, but luck was also on his side. Sajators had sustained no other injuries than a light abrasion from being scratched up by branches. On the surface at least.

His body wavered as he attempted to stand on his own two legs. He managed to parry Sungchul's blow with his demonic hand, but the recoil he had received at that time had delivered a blow to his internal organs unseen to the naked eye. It was a fearsome strength.

'It's enough to make Daltanius with his strength that has almost hit 1000 look like a child...! How does someone like that exist?'

Honestly, he had been confident. Sajators was a Mage, but he was proficient in dueling and enjoyed them. He was born with vast reserves of mana and a mind capable of memorizing a great number of spells. It was difficult to find anyone on the continent who could face against him after he unlocked the secrets of casting multiple spells at once. It was to the point that even Desfort, who later became the leader of the Seven Heroes, had only a slight advantage over him. And for a man such as Sajators, Sungchul was the first opponent of his kind. He was simply too fast and too strong. One proper hit from this opponent would be the end of him.

'It's frustrating, but it looks like he's an opponent that's out of my league.'

Sajators changed his mind. His character flaw was his arrogance which led to frequent mistakes, but he was also one to carry out his task regardless of who tried to stop him once he set his mind to it.

He set two hard rules on facing Sungchul. First, avoid a fight. Second, do not allow him to approach regardless of circumstance. In short, he had decided to flee.

Sajators was well versed in this manner of duty as well. He was different from the average mages as he was quite mobile with his everchanging movements and possessed peerless instincts.

Sajators ruffled his mantle with his hand after organizing his thoughts. 3 of the 6 Soul Stones hidden underneath it each had different magical formations upon it. The first soul stone had Invisible, a transparency magic from the School of Illusions, cast upon it while the others had the general purpose Fly and Magic Shield cast on them. The three Soul Stones were cast almost simultaneously granting him the ability to fly, protection against magic, and an invisibility effect. The rest depended on Sajators' wit and his movements.

After casting Invisibility he flew through the tall grass, heading towards the river. The reason why he chose to head towards the river was because it lacked distinct geographical features around the area. He could have flown through the open sky, but the risks were too great.

Sajators maintained a height just barely above the meandering murky waters and continued to fly forward at breakneck speed.

‘Let’s make some distance first.’

His best option in terms of survival was to just immediately cast a Long Distance Teleport to break far away from the battleground, but his pride did not allow him to resort to that. He had gone as far as to kill Vestiare’s miniature form who had warned him against combat, so he would be mocked if he were to choose to flee and fail to complete his objectives.

‘I have to awaken the Giant no matter what.’

Sajators’ eyes grew cold, but he suddenly noticed a wave that was approaching him. It was a massive torrent of water.

‘Hm? I was definitely downstream.’

The rapid torrent of water was heading upstream like a tidal

wave. It was clear that he would suffer heavy losses if he was caught up in the waters.

Sajators raised his elevation slightly to barely evade the oncoming wave. However, the area below his feet became dark at the very next moment.

‘Shadow?!’

The moment he lifted his gaze to look above, he saw it. The object that was descending from the direction of a rather large tree aiming directly at him.

A Soul Gem flashed as Sajators made an elegant gesture with his hand like he was pushing something away. As he did, the object descending from the massive tree seemed to bounce away with a powerful force and changed its trajectory to land beside Sajators causing him to fall headfirst into the river below. However, that wasn’t the end.

Sajators then discovered the silhouette of a person running toward him like a whirlwind by the riverside. The figure had his head shifted to the side looking directly at him. Fear rose in Sajators’ eyes.

‘That bastard... He can see through my invisibility?!’

He wasn’t aware that Sungchul had the Soul Contract known as the Eye of Truth. Sungchul immediately drew Fal Garaz high into the air as he made eye contact and struck at the gravel piled up on the riverbed. The ordinary stones rolling about the mud had become instilled with godly strength and turned into fearsome tools of murder.

Two of Sajators’ Soul Gems lit up. It had only flickered for a fraction of a second but Sungchul, conditioned through hundreds of battles against Mages, was able to grasp the general spells being cast by the crystal in Sajators’ Soul gems.

[Elementary Wind Magic]

[Elementary Destruction Magic]

There was an explosion in the gravel ahead of where Sajators was flying towards and another sound of impact which caused powerful winds to kick up in the area.

‘One is a strike and the other must be something that performs a similar function.’

Not much was known about Wind Magic so it was not clear as to what magic was used, but the purpose of both spells was clear. The two rounds of artificially created explosions, or gusts of wind close to one, were used to weaken the momentum of the gravel. And as intended, the gravel was greatly slowed and harmlessly bounced off the Magic Shield surrounding Sajators’ body. It was a degree of adaptability that was rarely seen among mages.

Sajators didn’t stop after deflecting Sungchul’s assault. He flipped his body midair to reorient himself and activated several spells simultaneously. Six magic formations cast upon his Soul Stones rose upon Sajator’s body simultaneously. Sungchul’s eyes were able to grasp the meaning of the overall seven magic formations in an instant.

Sajators [Medium Destruction Magic]

Soul Stone 1 [Fly]

Soul Stone 2 [Magic Trap: Flame Attribute]

Soul Stone 3 [Inferno]

Soul Stone 4 [Mutation School of Magic: Transform]

Soul Stone 5 [Magic Shield]

Soul Stone 6 [Dimensional School of Magic: Large Scale Summon Magic]

Admiration appeared in Sungchul’s eye as he saw all this.

‘This is what they call a Multicast Mage.’

Each spell had their own casting times and usage, but they all had to be arranged very carefully. Aside from one Soul Gem that was maintaining the flight magic Fly, the first aria to be completed was Medium Destruction magic cast by Sajators himself.

“Explosion!”

The air around Sunchul was immediately being sucked away. It was the sign of an explosion. The moment he moved away, a powerful bang occurred where Sungchul had stood. The second Soul Stone’s magic trap and the fifth Soul Stone’s Magic Shield were prepared even before the heat from the explosion had faded.

Another protective veil of magic enveloped Sajators’ body and the afterimage of a magic formation shining with the various different forms of a magic trap was installed at his front. There lied a fairly painful trap between Sungchul who had retreated from the explosion’s explosive force and Sajators.

As Sungchul was confirming the location of the trap with his eyes, the aria for Soul Stone 4, Transformation, was complete.

A dark liquid with a pungent stench similar to asphalt was spread around Sungchul’s vicinity. It was the same one that had been spread around the pyramid before it was burnt down.

Sungchul swiped at the ground to evoke a dust storm in order to repel the black liquid that approached him. It was at this time that the aria for Soul Stone 3, Inferno, was completed by a hair’s breadth and a destructive wall of fire was laid out around Sungchul.

Sungchul heard sounds of explosions in between the flames swallowing up everything in its path, and the dust storm scattered in all directions. It was the sound of the sand and earth that had been thrown up by Sungchul exploding due to the black liquid it had absorbed.

Sungchul retreated before the searing wall of flames could

overwhelm him. A frontal assault was possible, but the magic trap bothered him. It might blacken his clothes.

Sungchul was not a man with nothing else to wear, but he was someone who wore clothes that he liked until it faded.

He reorganized his thoughts on Sajators as he retreated.

‘This bastard could be very annoying when he decides to be a thorn at my side.’

It is easy to visualize the common idea of a powerful Mage as someone possessing a lot of magic power and seeking out high level magic, but Sungchul felt that the true measure of an excellent Mage was his battle instinct, and adaptability. This was the truth he discovered for himself after battling countless Mages. Sajators appeared to be in both camps, and so he had to be killed before the other Seven Heroes could gather.

Sungchul evoked an adamant intent to kill in his otherwise callous eyes. He circumvented the wall of flames caused by Inferno and entered through the riverside catching a glimpse of Sajators. Sajators was attempting to flee through the riverbanks away from Sungchul after laying his flame traps. It looked as though the aria of his sixth Soul Stone, Mass Summoning, was yet to be completed.

Sungchul felled a large tree nearby with a swing of Fal Garaz and sent the entire thing flying toward Sajators like a javelin. Sajators who had been flying at high speeds evaded the tree with a zigzag movement, but Sungchul was actually aiming for the flame traps.

Whoosh!

The flame traps laid out by Sajators were triggered by the large tree automatically causing the tree to be burnt to a pile of ash in an instant. Sungchul charged towards Sajators once again after the bothersome obstacles had been dealt with.

It was at this moment that the Mass Summoning Magic cast upon Sajators’ Soul Stone was now complete. A massive magic

formation was cast in his vicinity causing golems made of stone and steel to pour out from within.

“Huh? Aren’t those made by papa? Why does that man have it?”

Bertelgia shouted in anger. Sungchul pulled out and held the Demonic Weapon Cassandra with his left hand and proceeded to thoroughly destroy the charging golems with both the whip and Fal Garaz.

While Sungchul dealt with the golems, Sajators was initiating new spells on five of the Soul Stones. Sungchul caught sight of the magic being cast while crushing one of the golem’s head with Fal Garaz.

Sajators [Thunder Break]

Soul Stone 1 [Fly]

Soul Stone 2 [Slow]

Soul Stone 3 [General Purpose Magic: Physical Barrier Technique]

The rest of the Soul Stones looked to be out of commission. The only one among them that was concerning was Thunder Break which was known to be the most powerful magic within wind attributed magic. It might not be enough to kill him in a single blow, but it would inflict significant damage onto him.

Once the aria began, storm clouds formed above Sungchul and Sajators’ heads as though it would immediately rain. Just then, the aria of Soul Stone 2, Slow, was completed causing an aura of malice to envelope Sungchul. However, it was a low grade magic and was nullified after it bounced off the protection of Sungchul’s Soul Contract, Thunder Shield. All that was left were the small number of golems, the magic shield, and the unknown physical barrier technique whose aria was still in progress.

‘So you’re going to do it that way?’

Sajators appeared to have not fully comprehended the extent of

Sungchul's power. No, it was possible that he wasn't able to consider the possibilities because he was so overwhelmed by Sungchul's oppressive strength. Sungchul wrapped around the final golem with the Demonic Weapon Cassandra and threw it toward Sajators utilizing the centrifugal force.

Sajators who was now surrounded by Magic Formations evaded to the side and attempted to finish his final aria. His face was fearful but unshaken.

Sungchul rushed toward Sajators with Fal Garaz in hand. Sajators' Physical Barrier Technique was being completed. It was intended to resist a single blow so that he could counter-attack with Thunder Break as it was normally very difficult to evade once Thunder Break was cast.

However, the situation quickly changed. The quiet jungle was suddenly filled with the cry of something massive that was impossible to describe, before tree roots from some distant place began to swallow up everything in its path.

'Is the Tree Mother responding to the battle?'

Sungchul gave no heed to the change in his surroundings and delivered his prepared attack. He first attacked with the Demon Weapon Cassandra in his left hand. Cassandra flew like a snake and coiled around Sajators, peeling off the Magic Shield wrapped around him. Next, he swung a blow with Fal Garaz.

Thunder Break's aria was in its final moments of completion. Sajators watched the hammer unblinkingly putting all of his faith in the Physical Barrier Technique that he had cast on himself.

The hammer struck the barrier that negated all physical attacks. Sajators body shook, but he received almost no impact. A smile formed on Sajators' lips. Thunder Break's aria was complete.

Unfortunately, Sungchul's finger was pointed toward him at that very next moment.

‘Glare.’

The beam of light from the School of Cosmomancy shot out toward Sajators.

“KWAAAAK!”

It struck Sajators’ body directly causing a black smoke to form. But, that wasn’t the end.

[Echo x5]

Five more beams of light shot out from the finger continuously, piercing his body mercilessly. Once the aria had ended, the perfect shape of the magical formation was torn to shreds. Sungchul grabbed the shaking Sajators by his collar.

“I told you didn’t I?”

Sajators glared at him.

“That I’d definitely kill you.”

Sungchul leaped down to the ground with Sajators in his grasp and smashed his face against a massive tree.

Chapter 123 – Sajators (3)

Crunch.

Sajators' face was smashed into the tree up to the halfway point. Sungchul pulled him out from the large tree. His face was ruined beyond the point of recognition.

“...”

But he was still breathing. Sungchul repeatedly smashed him against the ground surface as though he was hammering a stake. Every one of his bones was broken and his vitality was slowly being drained away. Sajators was dying without being able to say a single thing about it.

Finally, the sound of something snapping could be heard. Sajators had died.

Sungchul put down Sajators and lifted Fal Garaz. It was in order to not even let his corpse remain.

At that time, a strange light rose from Sajators body. Sungchul quickly realized that it was from an external source and not from the Mage.

‘It’s a Soul Contract of Resurrection.’

It was the Soul Contract that was frequently held by Cultists. He had heard the cultists of Airfruit also possessed the same. The benefit was that one could hold several lives, but as far as Sungchul could see, it didn’t matter. Getting killed once means you’re capable of being killed twice.

Sungchul waited for the light filled with authority to finish its task. However, the tree roots that had been enveloping the surrounding area was drawing close. Sungchul had been ignoring them earlier but the timing could not be worse for them to come this way. However, it was a godsend for Sajators.

Sungchul considered a single possibility.

‘Is it because of his Luck?’

Sajators was one of the Seven Heroes known to possess high amounts of Luck. Compared to Sungchul whose Luck is fixed at 28, it might even be several hundred folds higher. Luck is relative, therefore, there is a higher possibility of it coming to those with a higher Luck stat. Although it typically is not a major determinant in most battles, it occasionally brings about a dramatic change.

Sungchul lifted his hammer and swung it toward the light that had now surrounded Sajators. His hammer held godlike strength, but it couldn’t break something such as a Soul Contract that held the authority of the God of Neutrality.

At the moment Sungchul’s attack was negated, the tree roots encroached over to Sungchul and Sajators. Sungchul jumped into the air to dodge the encroaching roots and landed on a tree before he mercilessly beat up the roots. He powderized the unending waves of roots, but he wasn’t able to overcome nature itself that has persistently survived since the beginning of time.

“Ugh...”

As his body was being entwined, Sajators woke from the aggressive rumbling and made a faint smile toward Sungchul. He must have believed that he could escape now. And the circumstance certainly was ideal as the roots were growing thicker, blocking the way between the two.

If Sungchul had used Starlight, it would have been possible to incinerate Sajators, but he hesitated over casting it as his sight was obstructed. This was all the consequence of Sajators’ powerful Luck. The Goddess of Fortune had a habit of smiling down on the possessor of Luck during the direst of moments.

Sungchul who was miles away from being lucky had experienced this exact situation countless times. How many times had some

absurd situation, that was either inexplicable or nonsensical, come about to spoil his plans that had been ready and prepared at the final moments? However, he knew well on how to deal with people with high Luck as well.

‘I don’t like it, but I’ll have to use it.’

Sungchul let out a deep sigh and pulled something from his Soul Storage. A short spear... no, it was more closer to a short sword. The most important aspect of this weapon wasn’t its shape, but the endless abyss that wrapped around the entire object. The exploding sun was pouring down its rays of light upon the whole world, but the strange weapon wielded by Sungchul was being surrounded by chilling darkness. Bertelgia inside of his pocket shivered instinctively.

‘Could this be... perhaps...’

Bertelgia was not the only one in shock. Sajators who had been beaten to a pulp was unable to breathe from the terrible shock. His entire face that was covered in blood was now contorted in despair while he continued to mutter with all of his breath.

“How... how could you... hold that? That cursed weapon...?!”

Sungchul threw the short spear that more likely resembled a short sword toward Sajators. The weapon dyed in dark green light flew toward the enemy with its own will. Sajators desperately tried to resist, but ultimately, was unable to prevent the horrific weapon from getting stuck in his abdomen.

“You can run from me, but you can’t hide.”

Sungchul glared at Sajators with coldest of glares as he spoke until the thrashing roots swallowed up Sajators and his screams along with him. Sajators disappeared into the depths of the writhing roots.

“...”

A small bell, glowing with an almost black dark green light,

appeared in Sungchul's hand. When the bell was lightly rung, it rang out with a strangely clear noise. A self propelled short spear, and the ominous bell that appeared after the short spear disappeared; Bertelgia who was watching the whole scene was now certain.

‘That... is not a normal weapon. If what I heard is correct, then the weapon he is holding... is the divine weapon Oom Bruuk! Wielded by the Second Calamity, the Ruler of the Deep Seas, during my father and my era. It's the weapon of Calamity!’

Bertelgia still remembered the chilling story of the Priest of the Ancient God that lived eternally within the depths of the sea, lurking within the abyss where not even a single ray of light managed to penetrate.

It had been said that the Priest of the deep seas would come on shore riding a palanquin, moving very slowly. But, no one targeted by the priest was able to escape him. It was because the accursed being wielded the weapon of Calamity composed of a short spear and a bell, Oom Bruuk the one that judges.

‘But how did he get a hold of this weapon of Calamity...?’

According to legend, a weapon of Calamity was gifted directly from the god that initiated the Calamity and it was a part of the Calamity itself. It meant that the weapon of Calamity would also disappear once the Calamity ends, and no one can collect it. This also applied to those that felled the Calamity.

“...”

Sungchul climbed on top of the overgrown roots and stared expressionlessly at where Sajators would approximately be. When the bell was rung, the sound of the bell ringing was so unbelievably clear that it could be mistaken as coming directly from inside the head.

Sajators was near, but it would be a fruitless task to try and find

him in this current situation. However, it was true that his life was still within Sungchul's grasp. Womb Brook. Those with the short spear of Calamity embedded into their body would never be able to escape the sound of the bell. Regardless of how much Luck one possessed, it was impossible to escape from conditions set forth by the authority of a god. Sungchul who knew better than anyone checked the flood damage and then thought to himself.

‘This might be an unexpected boon. It might save me the effort of hunting them down if Sajators manages to call down reinforcements.’

The numbers didn't matter. It didn't matter if the other six joined him. Sungchul left the spot with no regrets.

“Hey...”

Bertelgia hesitantly opened her mouth to speak.

“What's wrong?”

Bertelgia trembled lightly when Sungchul replied.

“No, it's nothing...”

It was not the time for questions. For whatever reason it had been, Bertelgia seemed reassured and let out a sigh of relief.

—

Sungchul returned to the ruins. Clarise and Kruut were safe, but Kruut had mobility difficulties. His entire right arm had become severely damaged by the forced movements of the magic sword. Fortunately, it didn't look completely useless when Sungchul examined it. It would make an adequate recovery with enough rest and recuperation despite his advanced age.

“T-that person... what happened to him?”

Clarise spoke shakily while gripping the axe tightly.

“He fled with critical injuries.”

“He’s not dead?”

Sungchul did not affirm nor deny her question. Clarise looked at him to ask another question but gave up in the end. She had not seen Fal Garaz with her own eyes, but she had caught on that Sungchul was the problematic man in the rumors. Not only was such a powerful individual rare, but the book flying next to him served as the final proof she needed. However, the two adamantly ignored this fact. All the damage had been done, and they didn’t want to ruffle any more feathers.

‘Smart girl.’

Sungchul decided to compensate the two of them. He made a hand gesture toward the pair to lead them into the ruins. It had become completely destroyed by Sajators, but there were some remnants of the picturesque ruins still remaining.

Kruut’s jaws dropped as he caught sight of the wonder he had been chasing his whole life.

“I was right! Clarise! They all called me crazy and pointed fingers at me, but in the end, I was right! There was a kingdom of humans in the jungle!”

He forgot the pain in his arm as he hopped about roaring in delight, he was so happy he didn’t care who had guided him, even if that person were to be the Enemy of the World. But as he overexerted himself, he fell over backwards while holding his arm.

“Ugh!”

Tears were streaming down his eyes. They were complicated tears filled with joy and pain, but he was still joyful. He had managed to accomplish his life’s goal.

Sungchul had come across a few of such people, but he had seen many more that had failed. And even though each person had their own circumstances, Sungchul better preferred to witness the joys of people who found success than the resignation and despair of

those wallowing in failure.

When some time had passed and the old man's celebration died down, Sungchul spoke to Kruut and his granddaughter.

"Please return ahead of me."

"What? By ourselves?"

Clarise asked in surprise. Kruut didn't say much, but his eyes revealed a similar sentiment.

"I still have business to take care of here. I apologize, but the two of you will have to return."

"How should we return?"

"It's a difficult task to find something in the jungle, but leaving isn't a difficult task in itself."

"But, leaving by ourselves..."

Seeing Clarise's hesitation, Sungchul held out an Alchemic Bomb (Dark) and various other alchemic items from his Soul Storage. They were various items that could be used in all situations from combat to recovery.

"These will help. Use them in case of emergencies. If you insist on waiting by the riverside, I won't stop you. I wouldn't recommend it though."

Sungchul was still waiting for Sajators. From the moment he was stabbed by Oom Bruuk, Sajators was destined to appear before Sungchul due to the sound of the bell. If not, the sound of the bell ringing from the abyss will eventually destroy his mind and the limbs of the Ancient God will drag him away into the abyss itself. But there was no guarantee that Sajators will arrive alone. He could come alone, but as far as Sungchul could guess, Sajators was more likely to bring reinforcements.

Everything was as Sungchul wanted. Sungchul wanted to take care of the Seven Heroes as quickly as possible even if it meant that

the clothes he treasured so much would turn to rags. Kruut and others were hindrances in that regard as it was not a matter of when, but if Sajators did show up, an inevitable battle would take place. Kruut and his granddaughter would only get caught up in the fight and end up dead, or in the worst case scenario, be used as fodder by the enemies of Sungchul. It was Sungchul's intention to avoid unnecessary sacrifice.

“As long as you follow the river, the Lizardmen will not ambush you.”

Kruut fidgeted with the brace holding his arm and opened his mouth to whisper to Clarise.

“That man... he's probably that man.”

Clarise's eyes turned wide. She had finally internalized that a dangerous existence that the likes of the Lizardmen couldn't compare to was standing beside her*. They both bowed their heads and showed their respect before hopping onto their boat.

“Hey, wait a minute!”

Bertelgia stopped them, leaving Kruut and his granddaughter utterly shocked. There was a large statue occupying the space behind Bertelgia. It was a golem. One of its arms had been blown off and the stone and metal surrounding the core had been destroyed by the hands of Sungchul, but there was enough of its functions remaining that Bertelgia was able to modify it.

“This guy will protect you, singing older sis.”

The golem made a strange oong sound as though replying to her words before its eyes lit up. Clarise held a strange smile before giving a reluctant nod.

“O-ok...”

Kruut and his granddaughter got on the boat and headed back toward Panchuria. The golem walked on the floor of the riverbed and followed behind them.

“You’ve finally managed to earn your keep after so long.”

Sungchul gave a rare compliment to Bertelgia. It bothered him that he was sending them away so suddenly, but Bertelgia acted tactfully.

“I told you I don’t cost anything!”

Sungchul surveyed the area around the ruins. There was no trace of Multicasting that he had sought out for so long. He looked at the destroyed golems and the corpses of Carbuncles lying around them.

There was a single Carbuncle with white fur and a blue gemstone lying dead among the rest. It was the corpse of the King Carbuncle indicated within the ruins. The key to resolving the secret of Multicasting had disappeared. Even if he had an empty Soul Stone in hand, it was meaningless without the Spirit Technique to extract the soul. The Carbuncle must have died quite a while ago as it had already begun to rot. There was a mass of flies flying busily about it.

“That bastard. He did this so that he wouldn’t have to give up the secret to Multicasting! That’s really an evil man. I don’t think there was such a bad person in the past as far as I remember...”

“...”

The experience of having something he had worked so hard for to turn to dust was not something he experienced for the first time. Sungchul found solace by the fact that he had managed to meet Sajators and seriously wound him before he took his eyes off of the Carbuncle corpses.

The sound of a golem could be heard from not so far off. It was the small golem that had been cleaning the vicinity of the ruins that he had seen not so long ago.

“Poor thing. There’s so much to clean...”

Bertelgia clicked her tongue with pity as she spoke. There was

trash everywhere. Even the wreckage from the fallen ruins itself would take several hundreds of years to clean up.

The small golem was heading directly over to them. Did he have something to say? As they watched him, the golem was dumbly looking at the corpses of the Carbuncles.

Sungchul silently observed the golem's actions.

'Is he perceiving them as trash?'

Suddenly, something amazing occurred. The small golem dug the ground and carefully placed the dead Carbuncles with its two hands and began to make graves for them. It didn't speak, but the golem's actions clearly spoke of care and formality that could be observed in humans.

"Huh? That golem."

Bertelgia said as she suddenly flew towards it. She used the corner of her book to point out a hidden compartment concealed by stones located somewhere on the back of the golem.

"Look here."

"Is something there?"

Sungchul let out a sigh and looked over to where she was pointing. Curiosity rose in his eyes. The reason was that embedded in the hidden location on the back of the golem was a soul gem emitting a milky light just like the ones Sajators carried around.

'Could this be...?'

It was at this moment that the trail of crumbs leading to Multicasting that was believed to be lost was found again in an unsuspecting place.

Chapter 124 – Sajators (4)

Despite the rage that the Tree Mother had shown regarding the massive battle between the hero of old against the hero of the current age, she still displayed great generosity toward beautiful music. The sound of Clarise's beautiful music was making the thickly overgrown roots to retreat on their own, creating a path for them through the muddy river.

“Now that I think on it, I don't think the path is that dangerous.”

Kruut who had been on edge with all of the Alchemic bombs in his hands let out a sigh of relief before collapsing on the side of the boat. The roots laid out by the Tree Mother became a bit of a hindrance toward their progress, but it also was a reliable shield to protect them from their surroundings. At the very least, the path of the tree roots prevented encounters with dangerous predators or hostile Lizardmen.

Clarice carefully calmed her breathing and began to sing her next verse. It was at this moment that something fell out from between the automatically parting roots and fell into the water with a splash. She felt uneasy as she watched the surface upon which droplets of water floated on. Nothing emerged and the boat glided across the bubbling surface, and Clarice took her eyes away from the bubbles as she sang toward the roots blocking their path with all of her might. Suddenly, the stern of the ship began to tremble.

“Huh?”

Kruut let out a scream as he crawled on his back. His hands, now dyed in bright red blood, were holding onto the sides of the boat.

“Uggggh...”

He added all the strength he could muster to pull out a single man from the water. A man in terrible shape, with an entire side of his face ripped up beyond recognition, collapsed into the ship.

Clarice and Kruut knew full well the identity of this man.

“Shut your mouth... and continue forward... I won't harm you if you do as I say...”

The Multicasting Mage, Sajators, of the Seven Heroes began to hum softly while looking up toward the sky with a blank expression on his face. The area near his heart had a short spear with a dark green hue spreading bleak and bone-chilling darkness.

“Hurry...!”

Sajators who had been urging them heard the sound of a bell ringing in his ears. It rang the melody of doom that could only be heard from deep within the endless abyss.

—

He had been chosen to be a hero that would save the world before he was born. The greatest magicians fought amongst themselves to become his mentor, and ancient and frail sages were eager to hand over their Soul Inheritance. Young Sajators who was born in worship and expectations grew up to be a true hero that would face off against the Calamity.

When he finally became a Transcendent, an expedition was formed in order to overcome the Calamity of the Demon Realm. It was a group of extraordinary people hailing from various parts of the continent who have been raised into excellence or achieved excellence through their own strength.

But out of the many several hundred people that were on this grueling expedition, only 8 survived. The group had received a heavy blow that had almost wiped them out completely, but Sajators himself was never in any real danger. He had been outstanding from birth and had everything. No enemy nor danger was able to force Sajators into desperation. Even during his defeat to the head of the Seven Heroes, Desfort, he had lost by a narrow margin which was enough for him to feel excited, but he had never

felt anything close to despair. The world was never a dangerous place for Sajators who had been blessed by both god and man alike. Even to the moment he had chosen the path of Calamity of his own will.

How could he know that there was someone that could break the Multicast Mage, the killer of the Priest of the Abyss – the Sage of Absolom, and reduce him into such a pitiful state? It was the first perfect loss... no, despair that he had tasted within the thousands of years that he had lived.

‘Can... can I fight him again?’

He could hear the sound of the bell deep within his consciousness. He tried to inflame his dwindling fighting spirit using vengeance as fuel, but the sound of the bell that rang so clearly in his mind forced him to vividly recall what he had just experienced at the rough hands of Sungchul.

Sajators’ breathing briefly stopped and his pupils grew wide. His entire body that had been thoroughly injured began to shiver.

“Ugh...ugh...”

He knew by instinct. The terrible reality that he would likely never be able to challenge Sungchul ever again. The fear of Sungchul was now ingrained into his bone, no, to his genes itself.

“...”

Clarise and Kurut watched the young Mage nervously, who was staring off into space while shivering by himself.

“What should we do, gramps?”

Anyone could see that the state of this magician was extremely fragile; both in his body and mind. It might have been possible to end his life with a simple swing of the axe toward the back of his neck.

“Gramps. He doesn’t look too good. Should we just axe him?”

Clarise whispered while looking at Sajators out of the corner of her eyes.

“No! That bastard’s Sajators!”

Kruut spoke with fear.

“Sajators? What’s that? A snack?”

“That bastard’s one of the Seven Heroes. Not sure if he’s the real deal or not, but...”

He didn’t enter the Endless Library of La Grange for a week for the sake of his expedition for nothing. He knew roughly what kind of a figure Sajators was.

“Regardless of how wounded he looks, it might be better to just do what the man says.”

Kruut had his own thoughts on the matter. Sajators looked to be in such a critical condition that it wouldn’t be surprising for him to die at any moment now. He was bleeding out even now. Sajators would either die or lose consciousness on his own with no danger to them if enough time passed.

“Let’s just wait it out a bit. Time is on our side.”

Kruut’s words soon became fact. Sajators, who was watching the pair with predatory eyes, began to blink lazily before his figure began to waver. Anyone could see that he was losing consciousness real time. As the boat carrying Kruut’s party was approaching the wide opening in the river with Panchuria in sight, Sajators, with his head down, made no movement.

“Do you think he’s dead?”

Clarise’s hand that gripped her axe was instilled with a strength that she never knew she had as she glared at Sajators with burning eyes. It was too early to say that he had perished without a shadow of a doubt.

She conjured up some courage and slowly approached Sajators.

Kruut stopped breathing and simply watched his granddaughter's back getting ready to use the one alchemic bomb he had in his hands.

Sajators made no response. She couldn't even feel his breathing, so Clarise swallowed deeply and raised her axe high into the air. She was actually quite proficient with axes. She had received special education during her youth which allowed her physical stats to be outstanding, not to mention her time in the slaughterhouse after her family fell on hard times. Once she even managed to split the head of the Great Jungle Alligator, who had skin as hard as stone, in one blow.

She recalled those experiences and swung her axe with all her might.

Swish—

An arrowhead flew past her hair.

“There! It's them!”

Four boats appeared from within the reed forest. They seemed to be bandits or thieves judging by their appearances.

“That bitch has George ‘Reformed’ Hunt's axe!”

One of the bandits shouted while pointing his finger toward Clarise.

“Gwuh...”

The golem that had been following boat discovered the enemies and began to move quickly. The bandits were shocked by the sudden appearance of this golem, and hurriedly rowed backwards in an attempt to retreat, but only ended up getting caught with their backs exposed.

“Whiiiiing”

The saw a blade attached to one of the remaining arm of the golem began to spin precipitously. Unfortunately, its arm broke off

on its own suddenly as it was about to split the bandits' boat in two.

“Gwuuhh...”

The reason was simple. Sungchul's power was too strong. The golem had one arm remaining only in appearances, but in reality, it had sustained enough damage to only keep it attached. Its power core displayed red lights. This wasn't revealed when it was slowly following the boat, but its sudden actions during battle revealed all of its frailties all at once.

The armless golem became unable to do anything before losing its life and sinking to the river floor.

“What... was that?”

The panicked bandits regained their courage. They turned their boats around, but there was not much of a resistance. Kruut's group resisted with all of their might, but the bandits were experienced. Kruut had many items given by Sungchul, but the bandits ambushed them from below the water overpowering them before Kruut could utilize a single item. Clarise put up quite a resistance with her axe, but she was outnumbered from the start. After a final struggle, the boat was taken.

Kruut squeezed out pained screams while being pinned under the boot of the bandits, and Clarise who put up quite the fight was bound tightly with a rope. Sajators who had lost consciousness before the fight was forgotten in a corner of the boat.

“What should we do with them?”

An emaciated bandit asked the rough looking man who appeared to be their leader.

“These bastards are the enemies of my good friend George ‘Reformed’ Hunt. We can't let them live.”

His rough face looked over at Clarise, Kruut, then Sajators respectively.

“Sell the girl to a Human Empire brothel, kill the others, then dump their bodies into the river.”

At that moment, one of the subordinates sounded with glee.

“Boss! There’s something amazing here! It’s all gold coins!”

“Gold coins?”

The box covered with leather at the head of the boat turned out to be filled to the brim with shiny gold coins.

“Aren’t these the Merchant Coalition gold coins? I’m in luck.”

The bandit boss revealed his missing teeth as he smiled widely. The eyes of his underlings were filled with greed.

“So about that, boss. Can we just play with the girl a little bit?”

“She was pretty strong from what I saw earlier. Can you even handle her?”

“Ah... that...”

“Call over the Slave Hunter and break her first. If we kill her family or acquaintance in front of her before, then it should be several times more effective.”

The bandits made cruel smiles at their boss’ words as they approached Kruut.

“This is all for the sake of my buddy, George ‘Reformed’ Hunt.”

One of the bandits raised his sword into the air.

“Gramps!”

Clarise who was tied to the mast let out a sharp scream. It was the most joyous of sounds to the bandits’ ears, but something out of their expectations occurred. The man in a magician’s garb who they assumed was dead began to move.

Bloodied and his body covered with wounds, the man whose face had turned white as a sheet from fright let out a heavy pant from his lips.

The bandits who had been surprised at the man's sudden appearance began to laugh, disregarding him after the initial shock, but in the next moment, the young man extended his hand out toward the bandits. Their leader, a sharp-eyed bandit, could see that small magic formations were forming on the gems with a milky light strung up beneath the man's cloak.

“Huh?”

At that moment one of the bandits tilted his head in confusion and an immeasurable force exploded out from Sajators' entire body like a fan.

Scwick – Boom!

Crunch!

The bandits met their miserable deaths before they even realized what had occurred to them. Not a single one of them was spared.

“Ugh... that damned bell...”

Sajators' eyes lost its strength after having performed a feat of magic causing him to immediately collapse.

Kruut immediately freed Clarise, and she unconsciously approached Sajators. She could still distinctly remember him trying to kill them, but it was undeniable that this incomprehensible young man had saved their lives. Complex emotions that couldn't really be explained passed by her heart.

After some turbulent waters, she knelt by his side and looked over his condition.

“Are... you alright?”

“W...water. I need water.”

Sajators turned over his body and began to cough. Dark blood was mixed in with his coughing fit.

Clarise popped open the waterskin she carried with her and brought it to his lips.

“Clarise.”

Kruut stood in front of Sajators and shook his head, but Clarise didn't budge. Sajators drank all of her water and closed his eyes. He lowered his head down and spoke longingly as though he was dreaming.

“Eckheart... why did you not join us?”

Sajators lost consciousness with those words. Kruut grabbed the axe and came to their side. Clarise's deep blue eyes stared blankly at the glinting blade of the axe.

Chapter 125 – Familiar (1)

Sungchul and Bertelgia continued to observe the small golem. It continued down the ruin's stony path and swept up the smaller rubble that had fallen on it. The golem appeared to be stronger than its small frame seemed to indicate as it lifted the sizeable boulders with ease, and it used magic to move the ones that were cumbersome. It continued to work without rest for 50 minutes straight before leaving the ruins to head to another place. Sungchul and Bertelgia followed behind.

The golem arrived at a secret garden hidden within the jungle. Flowers of various colors were blooming beautifully around a crystal clear spring of water, and there were butterflies of matching vibrance fluttering about. It then stood still at a corner and gazed upon the garden for a while.

“Woah... this place is really beautiful, isn't it?”

Bertelgia fluttered about with the butterflies in the garden as though her mood had improved greatly. Sungchul's mood wasn't so bad either.

‘It's a decent place. It might not be so bad to show this to...’

A butterfly with pale violet wings gracefully landed on Sungchul's clothes and took rest upon it. Sungchul calmed himself by watching the folding and unfolding of the unknown butterfly's lethargic wings from the corner of his eyes.

Clouds quickly drifted past the dense foliage. Rain seemed imminent. It was at this moment that the small golem awoke from his rest, and Sungchul and his companion wrapped up their break to follow it.

The golem resumed its work. It endlessly repeated the simple but arduous task of cleaning up the fallen refuse. Suspicion crept up in Sungchul's mind.

‘That guy looks like a golem with sentience.’

Thankfully, Bertelgia was beside him. Sungchul immediately asked the question on his mind.

“Bertelgia, that golem over there. What do you think of it?”

“Hm. First off, I’m positive that it has sentience. It’s using the Soul Gem that has been used to store that Carbuncle Soul as both its core and brain, but its actions are definitely strange. It’s acting like a mindless golem despite the fact that it has sentience, you know?”

“Why do you think that is?”

“Not sure. Isn’t it because of the quality of the Entity?”

“The Carbuncle?”

“A clever Carbuncle would surpass the average person, but for a beast to be that diligent? I’m not so sure. Maybe an ant’s soul was mixed in? No... that’s not possible.”

“Mm... Is that so.”

The most important objective at the moment was to befriend the golem. According to Sajators’ description, the key to unlocking Multicasting was to form a deep bond with the Carbuncle that would become the second muzzle of magic.

‘In any case, why couldn’t this golem go into Sajators’ cape instead of being stuck doing this job?’

Sungchul recalled to his mind the description laid out by Sajators within the ruins. He soon nodded as he recalled a certain phrase.

[But remember this; if you take a Soul stone without winning over the King Carbuncle’s heart, then it could become as useless as those pebbles found rolling around outside.]

The one rolling about uselessly outside that Sajators was referring to had to be the small golem without a doubt. If this phrase was true, this golem had to have been protecting these

ruins alone, from the previous age's Calamity until now for thousands of years. Sungchul suddenly felt a deep sympathy for the small and dull golem.

‘Does that mean he protected the ruins in this place by himself for all of these thousands of years? What a lonely and pitiful fate it is.’

Whatever had been placed within the Soul Stone could not have gone of its own volition. Its soul had been extracted forcibly and imprisoned in the Soul Stone, and was relegated to hard labor when it was deemed useless. But why?

Sungchul decided to spend a bit more time on the golem's actions. It patrolled the ruins and continued its task in removing the fallen rubbish. The meaningless task with no end. However, the golem was met with a significant hardship during its task. It was faced with a massive refuse that could not be moved with neither its arms nor its magic.

“Gyuuung.”

It was the first time sound was emitted from the small golem. It was the unique “Woong” noise of the golems, but it had a cute aspect to it.

“Look at it, the poor thing.”

Bertelgia who had been watching quietly, now began to poke Sungchul's shoulder with her corner.

“Ey, big strong man. How about helping the nice golem? You don't have anything you're good at except for using your strength and catching people anyway?”

“I cook well too?”

Sungchul walked over to the small golem. It was obstructed by a massive rubble whose end couldn't be seen unless one looked straight up. This massive obstruction that appeared to need hundreds of horses cooperating to just barely drag it away was

moved with nothing more than the strength of one man.

“...”

Sungchul felt the god-like strength coursing through his body as he lightly tossed the massive refuse to the side.

‘Mmm... Despite everything, I guess something like this is still a problem for someone my age.’

He felt his hips stiffen as he looked over to the small golem.

The small golem for the first time had shown interest in Sungchul as it stared at him unapologetically with his two marble-like eyes.

“Gyuuung?”

However, it was but a brief moment before it resumed its work. Sungchul who briefly observed its work began to feel a pang of hunger and headed to the river. The massive rivers that crossed through the jungle was filled with fish.

“Mmm.”

Sungchul enjoyed freshwater fish, but today he wanted to eat something different. He looked at the surroundings and noticed a marsh connected to the river. There were cotton plants that had grown to a man’s height growing at places around the marsh. Sungchul discovered a large crab crawling below the cotton plant.

Crackle. Crackle.

Several mud crabs were being roasted bright red on a fire burning by the riverside. It was the most natural way of cooking, roasted over flames without the use of any spices or seasoning.

Sungchul tore off a crab leg that had been ready and pulled the pincer downwards. The steaming white flesh tempted Sungchul’s stomach. There was nothing more heavenly than this as he bit into it.

“Mmm.”

[The score of this dish... 22 points!]

The fact that the food received such a high score with nothing but the original ingredient meant that the material used was of excellent quality.

‘The area around the Screaming Sword’s Edge Mountain Range isn’t so bad.’

“Looks good.”

Bertelgia who hadn’t been interested in Sungchul’s dishes before was lingering around him for some particular reason.

“I like crab...”

“That’s quite the shame.”

Sungchul commented dryly before grabbing another leg and indulging himself. Bertelgia continued to watch him eating before she let out a sigh and hovered around him as though she lost interest before abruptly opening her mouth as though she remembered something.

“Oh right... is it ok for us to be so relaxed? Don’t we have to get that bad guy Sajators?”

“The one who needs to find the other isn’t us, but Sajators”

“Is it because of that weapon?”

She asked the question with deliberate naivety. Sungchul nodded, so she looked at his mood before asking another question.

“That thing... where did you get it from...?”

“It was a gift.”

“From who?”

“None of your business.”

Sungchul cut her off there.

“I see! Well, I wasn’t that curious anyways!”

“...”

As she became silent, Sungchul continued his meal in that silence.

Only the shells of the juicy and succulent mud crabs remained on the floor. Sungchul bit into a fruit that he had been eyeing in the jungle before heading toward the small golem once again.

The golem was still performing its endless task without complaint, but there was a difference. It was the small golem's path. As it cleaned the fallen refuse of the ruins endlessly, it was heading toward a single point. A small path had formed where the golem had crossed. It was clear to see that the golem was trying to break a path to a certain point.

“How about helping? You've eaten, and it'll cut down on time and increase his affection.”

Bertelgia spoke out, and Sungchul agreed that it wasn't a bad thought as he headed toward the small golem to assist it.

“Gyuung?”

The small golem peeked over at Sungchul before continuing its task. As Sungchul joined the process, the job became significantly faster.

‘It's been a while since I've done work like this.’

An indeterminable time passed before the small golem stopped its movements. There was a familiar statue standing straight up before the small golem and Sungchul.

‘This is...?’

It was a figure that could be seen in Eckheart's room before Sajators' attack. The small golem devotedly cleaned the figure's vicinity.

“Gyoong.”

The small golem stared at Sungchul unapologetically while it

finished the cleaning as though telling him to touch the statue. Sungchul slowly stretched his hand and reached toward Eckheart's figure, and when he did, faint words appeared in his eyes.

It appeared that a portion of the text was lost as the destruction of the ruins had disrupted the formation, but what remained intact activated. Sungchul read through the string of text.

[... If I had the Bertelgias that had been constructed all across the land, we might have been able to easily take care of the warlords of the merfolk and its armies that threaten the world; not to mention the Priest of the Abyss. However, it might be best to leave the Ruler of the Deep Seas to older brother Sajators and older sis Vestiare.]

“Bertelgia can you see it?”

Sungchul called out to Bertelgia. She shook her body.

“Hm? What are you talking about?”

“Try touching that model with your body.”

When Sungchul asked, Bertelgia brought a corner of her book toward the golem figure doubtfully and touched it.

“Ah!”

Bertelgia must have seen it as well. The message continued.

[If you are an Alchemist Class, you may act with your back straight and your head held high. Alchemists might not be able to create something from nothing like god, but they can create hope from despair!]

“Didn't papa leave this?”

Bertelgia's body lightly shook. Sungchul nodded and look on toward the final message.

[If you see Carbung still hanging about outside, treat it well. He is quite shy, but overall friendly. I should have stopped them when they were putting him in a Soul Stone... he's a good kid, so take

care of him for me. Who knows? Maybe he'll open his heart to you?]

The message ended there. Sungchul was suddenly looking up at the small golem standing beside him.

“Gyoong?”

The small golem was looking down at Sungchul with its glass eyes as it cried out.

‘It must have formed this path to lead me here.’

Bertelgia suddenly flew over to the golem’s shoulders and spoke with a gentle voice.

“Your name must be Carbung.”

“Gyoong!”

The small golem nodded.

“It’s papa’s naming sense, but I think it’s better than this man?”

Bertelgia spun around toward Sungchul.

“You have a problem with my naming convention?”

“You’re going to add some Favre or something.”

“Favre is a famous figure.”

As they argued back and forth, a significant change occurred to the small golem’s body. The chassis that surrounded the core opened up and the Soul Stone hidden within revealed itself. Sungchul and Bertelgia both shut their mouths and watched the small golem’s sudden action.

Carbung was speaking through its actions.

Take him.

“Why is it suddenly doing this? Did you actually manage to earn Carbung’s heart already? That can’t be right.”

Bertelgia spoke with skepticism, and Sungchul was in agreement.

His Charisma and Luck was at a solid 28. It was level of charisma that even a street cat could beat, but for one reason or another, Sungchul could understand the small golem's inner thoughts.

‘You must have been lonely, spending several thousands of years all alone.’

Sungchul had also spent nearly ten years in solitude. He knew better than most how difficult it was to spend those years in solitude alone. Sungchul felt as such after just ten years, but the golem had spent thousands of such years.

Sungchul reached out and grasped the white Soul Stone within the golem, and when he did, brightly lettered message appeared in his view. Curiosity rose in Sungchul's eyes.

[Familiar]

Merkit Carbuncle (Soul Stone)

A new category opened up in his status window.

‘This means that Bertelgia wasn't something like a familiar as I thought.’

He had realized that she had been an individual entity since earlier, but this simply confirmed this suspicion.

Another surprising event followed. The familiar who was held within the soul stone transmitted its intentions directly to Sungchul's consciousness. Sungchul looked at the Soul Stone before speaking to it in a low voice.

“What? You want me to make another golem in your stead to clean this place?”

The Soul Stone emitted a faint light in what seemed to be an affirmation.

Chapter 126 – Familiar (2)

The Destroyer. That was Sungchul's designation. Currently, everyone referred to him as the Enemy of the World, but the only proper designation acknowledged by the Oracular Seer was the Destroyer.

As the possessor of such a title, Sungchul was the type of person who preferred to destroy rather than create. It was the same with the Golems. He had destroyed so many golems that he could not recall how many it might have been, but not once had he put one together.

"It's not so hard. You know, creating a golem."

Bertelgia spoke in an unexpectedly boastful manner.

"Are you saying that one can make golems with Alchemic techniques?"

He felt uncomfortable as a layman, but he couldn't do anything about it.

"The only things that can be crafted through Alchemy are the golem's head and its heart which acts as its core. The torso and limbs will require the help of a mage or a craftsman. Regardless of how much power you hold, you need an intermediary to utilize that power right? It's not within the realm of Alchemy to breathe life into inanimate objects such as rocks."

"If that's the case, you're saying that we can't make a golem currently?"

Bertelgia floated about breezily at Sungchul's question and landed gracefully onto the golem who was hunched over behind Sungchul.

"There's already one here. An empty golem."

"So you're saying that we only need to make the core."

“Yep!”

“How do you make one though.”

When Sungchul asked, Bertelgia opened her pages as though she had been prepared for it already. It was a recipe, and Sungchul read it carefully.

[Core of a Miniature Golem]

Level: 6

Attribute: Gold

Recipe: Carbuncle’s Consent, Vortex Soul, Metallic Essence, Neutralizing Essence
Tool: Portable Stove, Hammer, Empty Soul Stone

It was a level 6 Alchemic item. It was a whole new realm that Sungchul had never touched before. And for the modern people who praise an Alchemist capable of producing a level 5 Alchemic item as master of the field, it was a new horizon they couldn’t even dream of.

Although Sungchul felt a bit intrigued, he also recognized an important problem. He looked at Bertelgia as he opened his mouth.

“Alright, so where can vortex soul be found?”

It was an ingredient Sungchul had never seen before, and he got the strong impression that it would be difficult to obtain as he noticed “soul” attached to its name.

Bertelgia gathered her thoughts and began to explain in a calm manner.

“Mmm, that... it’s a type of soul. It is a collection and mixture of a clump of near-soul-like subconsciousness from beasts or large insects that lack a proper soul like a human’s, which are for one reason or another fused into one. They got their name because that aggregation looks like a vortex, but it’s not that rare! Some of the

larger magic stores often sell them and are supplied by necromancers.”

“Sadly, there is no magic stores around here.”

“Mm... that’s true.”

The Tree Mother troubled their minds when they considered returning to Panchuria.

‘It has become quite the predicament.’

Sungchul laid on top of the debris and cooled his head. He decided to return to Panchuria after much thought. He knew from experience that it would be nothing more than a waste of time to force a solution that didn’t exist.

‘Kruut and his granddaughter must have returned safely to Panchuria, right? I should find them again and ask for guidance.’

Sungchul pulled out the Bell of Oom Bruuk and shook it lightly. Its sound felt more distant than before. It meant that the distance had increased.

‘He’s alive as expected. He shouldn’t be able to last much longer though.’

The bell disappeared without a trace when Sungchul gripped the bell much more tightly.

“We’re heading back to Panchuria,” said Sungchul as he stood up. He even gave the reason to Carbung the Soul Stone.

“We’re going to find the ingredients to craft the golem. I will keep our promise, don’t worry.”

As Sungchul walked forth, Bertelgia flapped on behind him. Sungchul soon felt the gaze of something he hadn’t felt before, looking in his direction as he prepared to leave the exit of the ruins.

‘There’s quite a lot of them.’

He roughly counted more than a hundred presence around him. They felt similar to humans, but it was a presence that was much more sticky and cold. Sungchul soon discovered the identity of the group that was looking at his direction. Those with the head of a lizard and the body of a man. They were the Lizardmen.

They had crossed over the border of the ruins that Carbung had been keeping tidy and were watching with bated breath while being hidden within the dense foliage of the jungle. One of the Lizardmen stepped out of the tall grass to reveal himself and roared when Sungchul had left the ruins.

“There. Human. Reveal your identity!”

Sungchul continued to trudge on and walked up to the Lizardmen. The others hidden within the foliage reeled back in fear. Sungchul found it strange.

‘Do the Lizardmen also feel fear? I’ve heard something completely different.’

Sungchul walked before the crowd of Lizardmen with his arms raised in order to show that he was unarmed. The lizardmen who had watched from up close were clearly afraid of something. Whether the cause of fear was Sungchul or not was unknown.

Soon, a Lizardmen wearing armor and a helm embedded with dazzling jewels stepped before Sungchul. This Lizardman whose height approached nearly two meters spoke with a dignified voice as he looked down towards him.

“I am Barmui, the Head of the Military within the Kingdom of the Lizardmen. I will ask once more, Human. Reveal your identity and the reason you are in this place.”

Gazes filled with hostility and fear flickered from behind this Lizardman.

Sungchul looked at Barmui and his subordinates with indifference and spoke in a calm manner.

“I am just passing by. I have only come seeking the Magic Tome hidden within this place.”

Sungchul wasn't the type to withhold the truth if there was no need for it. He knew fully well how small lies eventually catches your heels causing you to trip over them. In any case, the Kingdom of Lizardmen were an independent force separate from the elite class of the continent. They were unrelated to the Champions of the Continent, the World Parliament and others that opposed Sungchul.

Barmui flicked his tongue a few times in contemplation before opening his mouth to speak again in a serious tone.

“We had hurriedly gathered a reconnaissance unit and arrived here after hearing an incredible explosion ring out from this general direction. We also saw it. The destruction of the cursed ruins.”

Barmui glared at the ruins of the fallen pyramid behind Sungchul.

“Do you know what sort of event occurred here?”

“Sajators appeared.”

Sungchul hid nothing, but when Sajators' name was brought up, Barmui's eyes were filled with an expression similar to terror. But that was an understatement. The Lizardmen soldiers that were hidden within the tall grass almost convulsed as they let out an unfamiliar cry.

Sungchul didn't understand their reaction, but it was clear that the Lizardmen felt extreme fear toward Sajators.

“That... devil of legends appeared in this place?”

Barmui pulled out his weapon. Chakram. It was a perfectly circular throwing weapon. Three Chakram were spinning simultaneously on his thick, scaly finger making a chilling sound.

Sungchul watched the Chakrams' rotation with disinterest as he spoke again.

“Sajators tasted defeat by my hands. He is currently fleeing to somewhere.”

Barmui's eyes grew wide.

“W-what? That... devil lost? How could that be... That human devil cannot be opposed... I don't believe you!”

A shadow of distrust loomed within the Lizardmen's wide eyes.

“...”

Sungchul wordlessly pulled out Fal Garaz, and struck the ground under everyone's watchful eyes.

Boom—

The earth shook forcefully with a thunderous blast of sound. The force was so great that it caused a part of the wreckage that had been standing precariously in the distance to collapse; evoking a thick smoke.

The Lizardmen watched the scene with gaping jaws. Barmui was no exception.

“W-who are you?”

“I am Sungchul Kim.”

“S-sungchul Kim?”

“The other humans have taken to calling me the Enemy of the World.”

“The Enemy of the World!”

Barmui shouted with a raised voice. He might not have recognized the name Sungchul, but Enemy of the World seemed to have resonated with him.

“Prepare for battle!”

Barmui fell back dexterously and joined his subordinates. The Lizardmen that had been hiding within the tall grass spun their spears and chakrams and took a battle stance.

A shallow moan escaped Sungchul's lips.

‘Did my infamy manage to spread this far?’

It was at this moment that an elderly Lizardman escorted by guards in ornate clothing, stepped out from between the Lizardmen and walked slowly toward his direction.

“Stop this. Barmui, this human is not our enemy.”

The elderly Lizardman possessed white scales that definitely stood out from the others, and the clothing enveloping his body appeared more ornate and refined than Barmui's. It was clear with a single glance that he was from a noble class. A single word appeared within Sungchul's hazy memories.

‘This Lizardman. Is he from the Priest caste?’

William Quinton Marlboro. The man currently referred to as the Emperor had mentioned the social hierarchy of the mysterious race known as the Lizardman. According to him, the Priest caste was only behind the Royal caste and were a noble existence that was located near the very top of Lizardman society which was shaped like a pyramid.

“I recall hearing your name from the past. Sungchul Kim.”

The Lizardman spoke, and curiosity rose within Sungchul's eyes.

“You recognize my name.”

“Your name isn't the only thing I know. I also know that you are facing the Calamity alone instead of the cowardly humans.”

Sungchul felt that a line of communication might have opened here. He held a faint smile as he put Fal Garaz away, and as he did, the elderly Lizardman lightly waved his hand causing the other Lizardmen to lower their weapons.

“I am Murohk. I am the Head of the Priests.”

The elderly Lizardman opened his arms in a sign of welcome.

—

It was a mountain. Like countless other mountains whose origins can't be discerned, it witnessed the endless changes of the seasons as it remained in its place for thousands of years. There was not a single person that doubted its identity as a mountain as this assumption seemed natural as the rising of the sun from the east, but mere decades ago, around the time magicians of the Holy Kingdom of Ruteginea were escorted by strict guards to survey the area, strange rumors began to circulate from those that made a living traversing the mountains. They said the mountains had faces.

The Holy Kingdom of Ruteginea collapsed and those magicians dispersed leaving those curious to seek out the faces of this mountain, but nothing that resembled a face could be found. Rumors about the mountain, Savior's Peak, began to fade away until it was eventually erased from people's minds.

Currently, there was something completely unprecedented unfolding on Savior's Peak.

“Hahaha! It's moving! It's moving!”

A man and a woman were watching Savior's Peak which was causing massive quakes from a tall mountain. The man had a titan-like built whose bulky muscles could be clearly seen despite his thick coat. It was rare for anyone of the current age to recognize his face, but anyone in the past would recognize the man wearing a lion's pelt from a distance and shout in awe. He was one of the Seven Heroes, the Contender of Infinite Strength, Daltanius.

At his side was a pale woman in white standing as still as a picture. The Echo Mage, Vestiare. She watched the earth, sand, and trees fall below into the inky darkness as she opened her

mouth to speak.

“Communications with Sajators has ceased.”

“Sajators?”

Daltanius clenched one eye shut as he asked in a husky voice.

“Yes.”

He then crossed his arms and gave a toothy smile.

“Well, he’s always done as he wanted. Isn’t this a common occurrence by now?”

“The problem is that the Giant in the jungle region hasn’t been activated.

“Is that right?”

“It shouldn’t be the case, but there might be trouble on his end.”

“That might be bad. Regardless of his character, we can’t do without his talents.”

“I would say that that is the reason I wanted to check it out myself, but as you know, he doesn’t like me. Very much so.”

Daltanius understood what she was implying.

“Are you asking me to go in your stead?”

Vestiare held a faint smile at his question and nodded.

“You have relatively good relations with him, so he shouldn’t have an issue accepting your help if there is some complication.”

“Well, it can’t be helped. This Daltanius has been called upon as the most powerful courtier!”

He had a wide smile as he punched the earth with his fist. The large bedrock shook before falling down the steep cliffs into the darkness below.

Boom!

A massive god-like figure raised itself above the broken stone.

The identity of this figure, referred earlier as a mountain, was known only to an extremely small number of select people. The Colossal Calamity War Machine, Bertelgia. The colossus that was created to combat the Calamities befalling humanity was now becoming a part of the Calamity and bring the wrath of gods upon the humans.

At the same time, the appearance of extremely massive golems that resembled god was being reported all across the continent. The elites of the World whose attention had been focused on the appearance of the Seven Heroes could only watch helplessly as these giants that appeared simultaneously began to head toward their territories.

Chapter 127 – Familiar (3)

Sungchul changed locations from the ruins and was led to a checkpoint within the Lizardmen border that was not too far away according to Murohk's request. The reason they gave was that the golem that patrolled the area around the ruins could appear at any moment.

Murohk told Sungchul to ask for anything he needed after arriving at this fairly wide checkpoint, and Sungchul immediately asked whether he would be able to obtain a Vortex Soul. He didn't have much expectations, but luck was on his side. Murohk ordered Barmui to send his fastest soldier to the Kingdom to bring back a Vortex Soul.

Naturally, there was some time before the soldier would arrive during which Sungchul was able to hear some stories of the past from Murohk.

“Sajators... no, the Seven Heroes were known to have saved the world, but in reality, they were another form of Calamity to us.”

Murohk told this not-so-well-known story that occurred thousands of years ago. The Seven Heroes that felled the King of Demons rose in fame as well as authority. All the Kings and Sovereigns happily handed them seats of honor, and they spared nothing within their limits, and they gradually grew arrogant steeped in passionate praise and blind worship.

They triumphantly entered the battlefield when another Calamity, the Calamity from the Deep Sea, began. But the Merfolk from the Deep Sea proved to be much more of a cunning and tricky foe compared to the Demons. The Seven Heroes often failed to protect those they were meant to protect which led to a steep decline in their reputation over time.

It was at that moment that the Seven Heroes changed. They were no longer heroes, but tyrants. They demanded great sacrifice from

the common folks that lived in the era of Calamity, under the justification of stopping the Calamity.

It was no different within the Great Jungle. Murohk spoke further with a groan.

“Sajators invaded our kingdom leading a great number of golems to kill our king and massacre countless ancestors, all with the excuse that we didn’t comply with his request. And then he ordered the surviving ancestors to build this accursed ruin.”

Murohk pointed over to the collapsed ruin with his finger.

“My God... Lizardmen made that...”

Bertelgia spoke apologetically with a weak voice.

“Countless ancestors died under that cruel labor, and Sajators who committed such unspeakable brutality felt not an inkling of shame.”

Murohk’s eyes burned with anger.

“To stop the Calamity. Sajators justified his cruelty with this single phrase.”

It was then that Sungchul knew the old Lizardman’s words had substance behind them as Murohk’s phrasing was hinting at Sungchul as well apart from Sajators. More than anything, his piercing gaze revealed his insinuations.

Sungchul spoke in a calm voice.

“I am different than those people.”

“We hope that is so.”

From afar, a Lizardman soldier ran over in their direction like a streak. It was the soldier sent to retrieve that Vortex Soul. Sungchul bid farewell to the Lizardmen after receiving the Vortex Soul.

“Ah, I have one more thing to say.”

Murohk began to speak as Sungchul was about to leave, and when he turned back, Murohk continued without hurry.

“The City above the River. Do you know who founded the city that the humans call Panchuria?”

Sungchul shook his head.

“Sajators,” said the Lizardman.

“Sajators?”

Murohk continued with a voice filled with fear and unease. “There is something beneath its waters. Even we don’t know what it is, but one thing that we can say is that it’s something great and immeasurably dangerous. That is all.”

He then rose to leave after handing Sungchul a single flute.

“Seek us out any time you have a question. The sound of that flute will lead you to our Kingdom.”

Sungchul held the Vortex Soul and looked toward the retreating figures of the Lizardmen without expression.

*

It was around the time when Sungchul was observing the rear of the small golem in the area around the ruins. There was a deathly silence surrounding Clarise and Kruut’s boat. Clarise was looking at the Magician slumped beside her foot. She gripped the menacing axe within her hand.

“Clarise.”

Kruut called his granddaughter over with concern in his voice. Clarise slowly nodded and raised the axe.

‘Swish!’

She clenched her eyes shut and brought down her axe with a shout.

Thump.

She could feel something being cleaved.

‘I... killed someone...!’

Guilt and a thick sense of futility pierced the hole in her heart and poured out like floodwater, but it couldn’t be helped. It was to kill or be killed. Clarise gasped heavily as she mentally justified her actions.

“Clarise.”

Kruut’s voice could be heard from behind her.

“Uh... Clarise.”

Clarise felt irritation rise from the sound of her grandfather’s voice. Wasn’t it because of her grandfather that she had to commit this murder? Every single act was because of him.

“What do you want?”

She turned back with irritation. Kruut was pointing in front of him; the direction that she didn’t want to see where her axe would be buried into the corpse.

“What? What? Just what do you want to say!?”

“No, just look at the front! The front!”

Kruut was pointing forward with a pale face. Something was wrong. Clarise swallowed hard and turned her head as unnaturally as a clockwork doll to face the pointed direction.

“Huh...?”

Her axe hadn’t landed on Sajators, instead, a small girl had appeared out of nowhere in his place.

“Hi...Hiii...!”

The moment Clarise was about to begin screaming, the expressionless girl pushed the axe out of her shoulders where it was embedded. Clarise lost her grip on the axe, falling backwards and landing on her behind after she witnessed such an

unbelievable and surreal sight.

“I’ll warn you now, but if you do something like this again, I’ll kill you all.”

The girl with a pale skin spoke with a frosty tone. Kruut and Clarise immediately froze.

The girl then approached the fallen Sajators. One of the Soul Gems strung within Sajators’ mantle was giving off a light. She held the Soul Gem and spoke while stroking it tenderly.

“Thank you, Carbungbung. If not for you, your stupid owner would’ve already died to some nameless woman.”

The girl looked toward Clarise again after her speech. The moment their eyes locked, Clarise’s party felt enough pressure to cause their breaths to be stuck in their throats.

“This is an order. Look after this man with utmost care until his body is recovered. If the man is dead by the time I return..., I’ll make you regret that you survived.”

The girl disappeared within a magical formation after leaving such an unbreakable command. Kruut and Clarise had no other alternative, and it was after this moment that the Asaam family began their unusual cohabitation. Clarise suddenly had to invite two people, who she never wanted to let in, into her small cozy home floating above the water. She wiped away Sajators’ blood and wet his lips with wet cotton, and went as far as traveling large distances by boat to find medicine to smear onto his affected areas. Kruut was no help throughout this entire process, and it was a miracle that he didn’t get drunk and cause a mess.

Sajators recovered his consciousness after a day. He opened his eyes and looked around the bed and saw her; the brunette woman dozing off with shut eyes sitting by his bedside in an unfamiliar room.

“What is all this...”

Sajators felt unease rising from his chest as he lifted his body. It was at this moment that he felt pain jolting throughout his entire body causing him to let out a brief scream. A clear sound of a bell rang out as he suffered. It was the chilling sound that reverberated from within the abyss. Sajators' pupils shrunk.

‘That’s right... I...!’

The back of the unforgettable man rose up in front of his eyes like a nightmare. The mere memory was enough to cause his entire body to lose strength and his breath to be caught. Clarise opened her eyes at that moment. Seeing Sajators awake, she soon became nervous and flustered, eventually calming down to ask.

“A-are you alive?”

“Are you stupid? Can’t you tell by looking?”

Sajators winced as he brushed the loose hair from his eyes. He was haggard and in terrible condition, but it could not conceal his naturally attractive features.

“Have you nursed me to health?”

Sajators asked. He could never dream of the fact that she had actually tried to swing an axe in his direction, and it was because of this that the toxicity behind his gaze and voice were fairly subdued. Sajators waved his hands towards Clarise’s direction as if he was annoyed.

“Leave my sight, wretched woman. I think all of the food I’ve eaten for the last 3 days will come back up if I keep looking at your ugly face.”

“Oooo....”

She felt like blood was rushing to her head because a man who looked younger than her kept calling her ugly, but Clarise knew just how powerful this man was.

‘Hold it in. Hold it in.’

She just barely managed to hold herself back with her fists trembling as she left to head outside. Sajators sat on the bed dazed without any expression before burying his head in his hands once she left.

“Ugh....”

There was physical pain, but the endless sound of the bell ate away at his sanity. He felt that it would end up completely destroying his mind at this rate; leaving him in a fate worse than death.

‘Is there no other way but to ask for help?’

Sadly, his pride didn’t allow that option. He especially didn’t want this information to fall to his nemesis Vestiare or Ga Xi Ong, whom he treated like an insect, and cause him endless shame. He would rather die.

‘Damn it. If Eckheart was still around!’

Unfortunately, Eckheart no longer existed. Of the Seven Heroes, he could trust only the Leader, Desfort, and Daltanius who was friendly with everyone, but he couldn’t bring himself to ask for help first. His lifelong lifestyle of living according to his whims while ignoring everyone else had caught up to him in this critical moment. He might have been able to come up with a plan with calm contemplation, but the endless ringing of the bell made that impossible.

Sajators felt himself being forced deeper into a corner and increasingly pathetic as time passed, and it was within this feeling of despair that a fourth of the day had passed. It was then that a sound of an argument beyond the door shook him awake.

“That man told us not to use the gold bars carelessly! Didn’t you hear him warning us to melt it down before using it because it’s dangerous?”

It was a female’s voice. An old man with his arm in a brace

opposed her.

“It’s just one. Do you really think something will happen? Do you think those friends thousands of miles away will come here just because of a single bar?”

The fight didn’t last long. It was because they couldn’t ignore the fact that Sajators was residing with them. He heard a single slam of a door and nothing more could be heard.

Sajators felt thirsty as he chugged the water bottle left on a table by his bed. It didn’t sate his migraine.

‘Shit. I’m going to have to ask Daltanius for help. Fuck my pride. It’ll be hard to keep my life at this rate.’

It was when he finally made the decision and attempted to calm his mind that he heard a song that he had never heard before drift in from the outside. It was a sound that was tittering in the boundary between enjoyable music and noise pollution, like walking on thin ice.

At first he felt the headache he was suppressing grow worse and wanted to immediately put an end to the sound, but the song reached a part where the delicate and yearning melody on the other side of the thin sheet of ice which slowly settled his emotions became longer, and he felt the sound of bell which was tormenting him disappear for a moment.

‘Hm? This is?!’

Strictly speaking, the sound of the bell didn’t disappear, but the lonesome and mournful song that could be heard from beyond the door carried the power to allow him to forget the rhythmless ringing that made him shudder. Holding his breath, Sajators listened closely to the song.

‘Ah...’

Only once the song ended did Clarise remember that a fearsome and unwelcome guest was staying in her home. She had forgotten

it momentarily. Anger consumed her mind at the thought of her grandfather whose actions were still so careless even as the situation deteriorated to this point that she started to sing to calm herself without realizing. It had been her habit to sing whether she was angry or sad. It was through singing that she was able to resolutely withstand the continuous waves of misfortune that followed after her brief happiness in her childhood.

‘He probably wouldn’t kill me because of a single song right?’

A breeze flowed from behind her rustling her hair and clothes. The door to the unwelcomed guest’s room had become opened. She made an awkward smile before slowly turning her head. She had to rack her brain for an excuse to appease this small, yet savage man, but the response that greeted her wasn’t anger nor chastisement. It was the forgotten sound of praise that she hadn’t heard in so long.

“Brilliant song.”

The appearance of an unexpected audience. Clarise simply lifted her eyes and observed as the strange man praised her; unable to discern how she should respond to this situation.

Chapter 128 – An Unfortunate Woman (1)

“Keep singing, woman.”

Sajators made a haughty gesture and ordered her to sing. Clarise’s song didn’t really inhibit the effects of Oom Bruuk, providing nothing more than a placebo effect, but this small bit of mental stability could become the critical difference to magicians, especially one as powerful as Sajators. Sajators activated a high class healing magic to completely heal his body clean while Clarise was singing. Broken bones were mended and the bleeding stopped. When he even recovered his lost eyesight, Sajators couldn’t help but let out a laugh.

“Fortune is with me today. She’s smiling upon me.”

Sajators’ Luck was at 542. It was an appropriate number for a man that held the world in his hand since birth. He decided to proceed to the next phase of the plan without taking a break and opted to call Daltanius over while he had the thought.

Sajators then ordered Clarise once again.

“Continue your song, you ugly woman.”

However, the song did not resume, and when he looked at her with irritation, Clarise looked back with a cowed expression and spoke cautiously.

“I’m sorry... but would it be alright if I rested my voice a bit? I’ve been a bit overworked for the past few days, and my throat is hurting.”

“Your throat is none of my business.”

Sajators, who had now recovered his strength, displayed his cruel nature with no inhibitions. He formed a blade of ice and threw it threateningly toward her direction.

“If you truly want to rest, I’ll make it so that you won’t have to

sing ever again.”

He moved the blade across her throat as to cut it out, but melted it away once it touched her throat. She couldn't help but think 'why am I so unlucky' as the freezing cold that shocked her awake began to crawl down her neckline.

Clarise was utterly unfortunate. This person would not have even recovered nearly as fast if not for her singing, and to reflect this, her Luck was at a 7. It was a lucky number in name only and caused her to live her life in misfortune. This was most evident at least in this very moment.

*

The Governor of Panchuria, Laurumei Chui, received a troubling report from the executives of the Coalition of Merchants.

“It seems that the Enemy of the World is within this city, and we have caught a man presumed to be his accomplice.”

The evidence was an edict sent in secret by the head of the Coalition, Governor Hornecko, which were distributed throughout the guild across the land. According to him, the Enemy of the World was spending the unmarked gold coins and bars stolen from the Coalition's vault as he pleased, and such gold bullions have been discovered within Panchuria. What this meant was that the Enemy of the World or people associated with him were out and about here. According to the executive from the Coalition of Merchants, this truth has already been reported back to the main headquarters of the Coalition.

But the problem started from there.

A giant golem comparable in size to a mountain appeared close to the regional Coalition headquarters and was destroying everything in its vicinity, and so the Coalition's main branch was unable to provide any kind of support.

This was why the executive of the Coalition had come seeking

this place out.

“We need the Governor’s help.”

The feat was passed down to the Governor of Panchuria, Larumei Chui. He had to make a decision on how would he deal with the Enemy of the World. But what was there that he could possibly do?

“Mm... I understand your position... but can we even catch him after deploying some troops?”

Larumei was quite astute, contrary to his dull appearance. He continued saying,

“Nonetheless, we can’t also ignore this. Colossi are said to have appeared all over the world destroying cities and territories as they please. Imagine if the Enemy of the World is left alone, how much more chaotic the world will become?”

He made an uncharacteristically practical decision as one of those in power of the Other World, but he would never dream that there was another golem sleeping at the bottom of Panchuria’s murky river that was capable of completely leveling the city.

“...”

At the same time, Sungchul was swimming in the murky mud water below the city. He had discovered the giant in question at a place close to the river bed.

‘It is of quite an amazing size beyond my expectations.’

Sungchul climbed aboard the a and looked about his surroundings. This city would disappear without a trace the moment another Bertelgia was activated. It was because the city was created to be nothing more than a camouflage for the giant.

‘I have to stop the activation of that weapon no matter the cost, but before then...’

Sungchul looked at the bell in his hand. The sound of the bell

could be heard closeby.

‘I’ll end Sajators.’

This was the main reason that he had returned to Panchuria. He softly stroked the Soul Stone strung inside his coat and spoke to it.

“I’ll make you a golem next time, Carbung. I have a problem that needs resolving right at this moment.”

An oar in one hand, and a bell in the other. Sungchul navigated toward Panchuria’s web-like waterways with his boat.

*

Sajators was listening to Clarise’s song with an impatient expression on his face. The sound of the bell rang out irregularly in between the lyrics, interfering with his concentration.

‘Its effectiveness is failing.’

Fortunately, he managed to establish communications with Daltanius. According to him, he was already heading in that direction and was preparing to engage in Long Distance Teleportation.

‘That should be as good as being halfway done.’

Sajators aggressively waved his hand to stop the singing.

“That’s enough, woman.”

He threw on his outerwear and looked ready to depart. Clarise understood his intention in a glance.

“Are you preparing to leave?”

Sajators nodded. His disinterested eyes looked at Clarise before he pulled out something from his pockets. It was an ancient dagger embedded with dazzling gems.

“This is for your charity on my behalf. Receive it gratefully.”

Clarise looked at it with equal disinterest. It was because she had more gold coins than she could ever spend.

“Don’t you like my compensation?”

Sajators peered over in her direction through the corner of his eyes and asked obtusely.

“No, I like it.”

Hollow words. Sajators saw through it immediately. He scoffed and spoke in a confident voice as he always had before.

Well, since you did have a small part in my resurrection, so I’ll tell you a single truth as a special gift.”

Sajators spoke as thus and fixed his attire in front of a mirror before hesitating slightly. He adjusted his clothes for so long that Clarise had begun to lose interest before he spoke coldly.

“Take all your belongings and immediately leave this city once I leave this place.”

“What? What do you mean?”

Clarise’s eyes shot up as she asked, and Sajators simply pointed a finger to the ground at his feet.

“Soon, this city will vanish without a trace by the hands of the giant sleeping below the waters.”

“T-that...”

It was still a lukewarm reaction, but she clearly looked surprised. Sajators smirked as he boldly stepped out the door.

“Be well, idiot.”

He stepped out the door without any hesitation. It was indeed an appropriate response coming from one of the Seven Heroes who was no longer burdened with the colorful emotions of an average human. However, Sajators walked right back in the house walking backwards the moment he went outside.

“Hm?”

Clarise tilted her head.

“Haa... Haa...!”

Sajators, who had quietly closed the door behind him, looked pale with fear and his rough breathing could be heard. The cause was simple. The moment he stepped outside, he could see a man on a boat passing by, wearing a tattered coat with his mouth clenched shut while holding a resolute expression on his face. It was Sungchul.

Sajators leaned against the shut door and was unable to move for a moment. Clarise asked bluntly.

“What’s wrong?”

“Shhh!”

Sajators frantically scanned the area outside with a fear-stricken expression on his pale face. Thankfully, it appeared that Sungchul hadn’t discovered him yet. It felt like a miracle, but in reality, Sungchul had been busy conversing with Bertelgia and did not pay attention to the other side.

“Why not just shake that bell for all its worth? Didn’t you say that Sajators could hear it when you shake it? Let’s just let him have it while we’re at it!”

“... That isn’t a smart method, Bertelgia. This weapon isn’t supposed to be used that idiotically.”

Sungchul felt the weight of the Weapon of Calamity in his hands more heavily than anybody. The usage of a Weapon of Calamity required a cost. Even Sungchul didn’t know what the exact cost of its usage was, but he could faintly feel something gradually escape from within himself. This was why he had to be deliberate in its usage, but Bertelgia thought differently.

‘Nothing good can come with carrying a Weapon of Calamity for too long!’

She hid her intentions from Sungchul and chose to carry out her plans via another method instead. She clasped tightly onto the

hand that held the bell and began to shake as hard as she could.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

The sound of Calamity resonating from Oom Bruuk fired off in a rapid succession in every direction.

“Bertelgia, what are you doing. So crass. Just get into my pocket. Nothing good can come from attracting attention.”

Sungchul extended his hand and tried to retrieve her, but Bertelgia returned to Sungchul’s wrist and firmly shook the arm that held the bell once again.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

Sungchul didn’t realize it, but this action was a critical hit to Sajators.

“Uuuugh!”

Sajators fell over with his hands clasping his mouth. He felt himself lose consciousness as pain seemed to be tearing his mind and body to shreds.

“Are... you ok?”

Clarise supported the fallen Sajators, but he shook his head violently and tried to calm his mind.

“Should I sing for you?”

Clarise blinked as she spoke. Sajators didn’t hear her. Instead, he continued to move his head awkwardly in an attempt to nullify the traumatic sound of the bell.

His actions looked like an affirmation to her question in her eyes. She cleared her throat and began to sing the song she was most confident in. Sajators hopped over to Clarise in surprise as her song began and clasped her mouth shut.

“Are you mad?! Please keep it down!”

He silenced Clarise before cautiously stepping toward the

entrance door and peeking through a crack. The boat had stopped.

“... I think I heard a familiar sound?”

Sungchul hadn't heard it clearly as he was distracted by Bertelgia, but he recognized that a familiar sound was coming from behind him.

“That's not the important right now!”

Bertelgia shook the bell again.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

Sajators eyes shot open. He rolled about on the floor with his hand wrapped tightly around his mouth.

“What's wrong with you today?”

Sungchul grabbed Bertelgia with one rapid hand movement and shoved her into his pocket.

“What? Let's just get this over with.”

Bertelgia seemed to be in a rebellious mood today. Sungchul made a bitter smile and rang the bell once again. The bell sounded very close. It could have been in one of the floating houses, and so Sungchul considered the traditional method of searching through every house and every room. It would take a long time, but it was an assured method as once Sungchul entered a home, nothing would escape his sight.

He jumped clear off the boat and approached the door of one of the floating homes. It was locked, but that meant nothing to Sungchul.

Crack

The lock crumbled like a cookie once Sungchul's hand gripped it. He then quickly searched the interior.

“Meow.”

Inside, there was nothing but a spotted cat. Its fur stood on end

at the sight of Sungchul, revealing its wariness. Sungchul headed toward the next abode and began anew.

While he was searching the third home, a particular boat caught his eye. Five rough looking men were aboard. They were all wearing murderous expressions on their faces as they docked the boat by a house on the opposite side before clamoring up and surrounding a home.

‘That is?’

It looked like what was a common strategy among bandits. Sungchul hid in the shadows and watched their actions. The bandits seemed to have rehearsed this quite a bit as they used signals to surround the home while an agile man with a small frame jumped onto the roof and entered through the chimney.

“Mm... this neighborhood is as unsafe as I expected.”

Bertelgia rumbled strongly within her pocket and tried to ring the bell before growing still once again. Sungchul stood before the home that was now invaded by bandits and stared at it quietly. He wasn’t burning with a sense of justice, but he had the heart to step in readily once someone was threatened or if violence was used. A man’s scream soon rang out from the home followed by a brief scream of a woman.

“It looks like there are people inside.”

Sungchul nodded while leaning onto the banister and continued his surveillance with his arms crossed. The sounds, including the background noises, soon died down.

“...”

Sajators held a bloodied dagger and watched the fallen bandits

‘My luck’s turned rotten today.’

The one on the short end of the stick actually wasn’t him, but Clarise whose luck was even lower than Sungchul’s. Sajators was

simply caught up as a bystander who was standing beside her.

Chapter 129 – An Unfortunate Woman (2)

In reality, the intruders who were trespassing a moment ago were people who had no relations with Sajators. The small dextrous man who had leaped through the chimney and was now bleeding to death in the kitchen said thusly:

“I came from the Panchurian branch of the Merchant Coalition! Where is the Enemy of the World?! Clarise Asaam!”

Another man who had entered through the back door and was now sprawled out by the front door spoke up as well.

“Clarise Asaam! We’ve locked up your gramps! Come with us and cooperate with our investigation willingly if you want to see him.”

All of this was completely unrelated to Sajators, but to Clarise, it was extremely important.

“G-gramps?”

She began to tremble. She attempted to leave the house immediately, and she might have caused a ruckus if Sajators hadn’t pulled her back in by her hair.

“Let go!”

Clarise screamed in a shrill voice. This scream was what Sungchul and Bertelgia had heard.

“Shut it! I’ll kill you if you don’t!”

Sajators rushed toward her and threatened her while covering her mouth

“Why are you doing this?!”

“It’s cause there’s a fucker out there!”

Sajators peeked through a crack in the door while restraining her.

“Eek!”

His heart sank. Sungchul had driven his boat in this direction and was heading this way. He was bound to be killed at the hands of that man at this rate. There was only one way to overcome this danger, and so Sajators swallowed his pride and lowered his head to plead to the girl.

“I have no right to say this, but just once... just save me this one time.”

He would usually never have considered such an action as a prideful man who had been steeped in a lifetime of arrogance, but the man named Sungchul had inflicted such deep trauma upon Sajators that he might as well take his own life than see the man again.

“I vow that I’ll save that gramps or whatever old man that was after this ordeal. I swear it on the name Sajators of the Seven Heroes.

Clarise just stared at his pitiful form for a bit before nodding with a sigh. It was a request she couldn’t even refuse in reality. There was no knowing what the mad magician might do if she had refused, and as such she resolved the situation with a cool head as someone who had spent most of her life struggling.

“Please keep that promise no matter what.”

“I’ll stake my name, Sajators, on it.”

Sajators then whispered something in her ear, and some time passed.

“...”

Sungchul stood in front of Clarise’s house. His hand still held the bell, but he didn’t ring it. It was because he came here with a different purpose. He knocked on the door, but there was no response. Fortunately, the door began to open as he raised his fist to knock the door down.

“Huh?”

Bertelgia responded first from her pocket. She took the opportunity to slip out of the pocket and flapped her pages.

“Isn’t it the older sister who sings well?”

“Huh...? Y-you are?!”

Clarise had an awkward smile as she looked into the face of the black haired man standing tall behind Bertelgia. Her heart seemed to drop. Even though they had worked together, the name that he had still carried the same weight.

‘The Enemy of the World...!! Why do I attract such weird people? I’m so unlucky.’

Enemy of the World in front of her and an actual Calamity behind her. She felt like she was going insane, but she desperately maintained a cool head as she greeted Sungchul.

“What are you doing here? Do you have some unfinished business with me?”

She spoke as such, but there were five corpses along with Sajators who was holding his breath just behind her back. Sungchul gazed past Clarice unemotionally to the gap in the doorway as he asked,

“Is there a problem? I just witnessed some intruders heading in this direction.”

“Ah... intruders? Those men... are sleeping at the moment.”

“Hm?”

“Well. They were unlucky. It’s a home of a single woman, but they invaded the home of a woman whose strength broke past 100.”

Now that he thought about it, the subtle scent of blood was reeking from the inside.

“What’s the exact value of your Strength?”

“It’s 132.”

“I see. I guess you won’t need any help in moving the corpses.”

“That’s right. I can do it myself. All I need to do is wait until the night falls and then I’ll feed them to the fishes.”

Sungchul nodded and shook the bell a single time out of habit.

Ring!

It was at that moment when a sound similar to a groan came from inside. Curiosity rose in Sungchul’s eyes.

“What’s that sound?”

When Sungchul asked, Clarise made a bitter smile and replied with as much nonchalance as she could muster.

“It looks like someone is still breathing. Oh my, I’m not as thorough as I should be. Ahaha...”

“...”

Sungchul didn’t suspect her much further. He knew her personally and had traveled with her as well. Not only that, he had also benefited them greatly.

“As I said before, you have to use the contents of that box carefully. Assassins from the Merchant’s Coalition will come calling the moment you use the coins.”

Sungchul took a step back after leaving those words.

“If you happen to see someone that looks like Sajators around here, let me know. I’ll be at the Emperor’s Outhouse.”

“Yes, I’ll keep it in mind.”

Sungchul was a hair’s breadth away, but he pulled back. Sajators let out a sigh of relief before putting his guard up once again. He felt that Sungchul may ring the bell at least one more time. And as he had expected, Sungchul turned around and rang the bell right in front of Clarice.

Ding!

Sajators felt a terrible pain but he made no noise like before. He grit his teeth hard enough to leak blood from his mouth.

‘Shit this pain...! It looks like I’ll be the victor here at this point.’

Daltanius could turn the tables on this situation if he came here. He alone can’t change Sajators’ circumstances, but the man was friendly with every member of the Seven Heroes. He would be able to gather all of them whom Sajators himself cannot call upon to this place. No matter how strong Sungchul was, he would not be able to face all Seven Heroes at once and win. Sajators calmed himself with these thoughts as he listened for the footsteps to walk away. Unfortunately, the accursed ringing of the bell began to blast out in rapid succession.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

Bertelgia was the culprit. She had grasped onto Sungchul’s arm when his guard was down and shook her body with all of her might.

“Alright! Found an opening!”

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

Oom Bruuk’s Bell of Calamity rang excitedly like one during a Christmas Carol. Sungchul simply made a bitter smile and watched her do it.

“I don’t think this kind of action has any meaning.”

However, it was different this time as he simply let Bertelgia do as she wished as Bertelgia’s feeble stamina would bottom out soon anyways.

“GRAAAGHH!!”

Suddenly, a man’s violent screams could be heard from inside the building. It was a familiar scream. Sungchul’s eyes flashed, exploding with hostility.

“Who is inside?”

Sungchul interrogated Clarise. Everything had fallen apart. Clarise didn't hesitate a moment before confessing everything.

"I was threatened. That man is inside."

"How could you do this to me?!"

Sajators abruptly shouted, but in reality, he hadn't done much for her at all.

"I tolerated your awful singing and even clapped for you!"

"Shut up! You short ugly revolting bastard!"

Clarise successfully returned the insult he had made of her appearance earlier and quickly took refuge behind Sungchul. Sajators tried to recite a spell while seething with anger, but it was an exercise in futility.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

Oom Bruuk's Bell of Calamity rang senselessly. The ringing of the Bell had the power to cause its victim to be rendered useless when struck nearby. When Sungchul successfully impaled him with Oom Bruuk, Sajators' death became but a matter of time. Sungchul turned to look at Bertelgia who was ceaselessly ringing the weapon of Calamity

"Good work, Bertelgia."

"I thought it was meaningless?"

Beltegia spoke sulkily, but Sajators luck wasn't done with him yet. As Sungchul was about to open the door to enter, a magic formation appeared behind him. It bore the sigil of the School of Dimensional Magic.

'Is it reinforcement?'

Sungchul retreated and watched as a giant of a man covered in lion pelt appear from the magic formation. That giant, Daltanius, let out a snort like an ox and locked onto Sungchul.

“Are you the Demolisher?”

It was a voice loud enough to cause the surface of the water to shake slightly.

Sungchul simply nodded.

I am Daltanius of the Seven Heroes, the Pursuer of Endless Strength. I have come here with the qualifications of a combat god.”

Daltanius flexed his muscles. An ominous aura filled the surrounding and the entire floating house shook as he stepped forward.

“Kya!”

Clarise’s tableware that were stacked within her house fell down with a loud crash.

“Come at me.”

Daltanius took a stance like a martial artist and gestured with his hand for Sungchul to approach him.

“...”

Sungchul swaggered forward.

“Summoned! Are you as strong as they claim you are?”

Daltanius was confident. He had heard Sungchul was powerful, but he only understood it as being as powerful or slightly more powerful than he was. He would soon learn how wrong he was.

The moment Sungchul’s fist flew by, Daltanius instantly grasped the amount of unfathomable power instilled in the attack when he saw the shock waves the fists aimed at his face was generating. He immediately understood that he must not be hit with it. He braced his arms and prepared to block Sungchul’s attack, but Sungchul’s fist was too quick and ended up landing on his chin.

Wham!

In just one strike, the large man was flung across the surface of the water like a water strider and crashed into a floating river house in the distance.

“Grr...”

Thankfully, his grit was much more tougher than Sajators and his Soul Contract that bolstered his recovery kept it him from falling by that single hit. However, his chin was still grotesquely twisted on his face.

Daltanius gripped his twisted chin and relocated it on his own before sticking out his tongue and giving it a whirl.

‘Thank god. My tongue is safe.’

Sungchul was watching the entrance to Clarise’s floating home from a distance.

“He’s a much simpler opponent than Sajators, but I will still have to keep an eye on him.’

Sungchul decided to end Sajators first. Unfortunately, Clarise spoke up with a desperate tone.

“Um, I’m sorry, but my grandfather is in danger!”

“Step aside.”

He had no time to help the woman. Sungchul was someone who was always aware of his priorities. He ignored Clarise and stepped forward.

“Shit! If I knew it’d turn out this way, I should have taken that bastard’s side!”

Clarise looked on venomously while shouting harshly. When Sungchul did not budge, Clarise stepped onto her own boat and using her characteristic strength, she rowed with all her might and disappeared to the far side of the waterway.

Sungchul entered the house. Inside Clarise’s home was Sajators hunched over as he quivered in both terror and agony. He began to

tremble like a puppy once he noticed Sungchul's military boots. Who would recognize this man as the Mage of Multicast, Sajators?

“...”

Sungchul stepped in front of Sajators like fate itself.

“Let me live.”

Sajators begged for his life.

“I am blameless. All of it was Desfort's decision. I was simply tricked into joining his plot!”

His will to fight had long since died. He had already become unable to challenge Sungchul ever again when he was defeated the first time. Sungchul stepped toward this pitiful form of Sajators and lifted him by his collar.

“L-let me live! Please!”

A magic formation appeared beside Sajators from which a number of little girls leaped out and dashed towards Sungchul. They were clones of Vestiare that she had created herself.

‘Are they a variant of Homunculus? What an interesting taste she has.’

Unfortunately, they turned to meat paste once Demonic Weapon Cassandra was retrieved from his Soul Storage, bathing Clarise's home in blood in an instant.

“I have come to keep a promise.”

Sungchul gripped the hand that held Sajators' throat a bit tighter.

“L-let me l...ive... I... I am...”

Even Sajators' incredible luck could not save him any longer. His luck was spent.

Crunch!

Sajators' neck was broken with his eyes still open. It was a

ridiculous end for a genius mage who once had the world around his finger.

Sungchul grabbed every Soul Stone that had been strung along underneath Sajators' cloak before throwing the corpse onto the floor and bludgeoning it with Fal Garaz. The corpse didn't even have a shadow of its former self before disintegrating into the muddy water below the wooden paneling of the floating house. His corpse that fell into the muddy waters spread blood in all directions as it sank to the bottom of Panchuria. But at the bottom of Panchuria's running river was a gigantic being hidden by Sajators long ago.

"Mm. Sajators had fallen, but there's nothing to do about it."

Daltanius was inside the cockpit of the giant's upper half. He pulled out a key in the shape of a book from his Soul Storage and placed it at the strange groove at the center of the cockpit as he spoke in a low voice.

"Awaken, Bertelgia Unit number 3."

The surface of the water began to rumble. Sungchul could feel an uneasy tremor beneath his feet.

Chapter 130 – Colossus (1)

Sungchul looked at his surroundings. The floating homes on the water were fixed with countless chains and ropes interlinked with each other and fastened securely, and Sungchul knew of the Colossus's approximate size. If a colossal being comparable in size to a mountain were to awake, this city would literally be destroyed.

“What should we do now?”

Bertelgia asked nervously.

“Can't be helped.”

He wasn't even acquainted with the people of Panchuria, and the people of this city weren't quite virtuous. All this was meant to say that Sungchul wouldn't be bothered if a few of them fell into the water and drowned.

Regardless, there was also nothing he could do at the moment. He had to wait until the Colossus made his appearance as Sungchul preferred not to engage in an underwater battle, but it didn't feel good twiddling one's thumb while waiting for tens of thousands of people to be buried at sea. At the very least, he would be different than the aristocrats that would be turning a blind eye while drinking alcohol. No, he had to differentiate himself. If not, then he would become the same type of person as Martin Breggas or Aquiroa.

“...”

Sungchul noticed the massive chain between both river banks that ran through the entire city and held the city solidly in place. If he cut it, the city might be able to avoid its destructive fate even if a colossi appears. The floating homes were boats themselves and would be able to withstand some degree of turbulence once freed from the restraints that held them in place.

‘I should use that here.’

Sungchul pulled out a massive blade from his Soul Storage. It was an eccentric blade that had been flattened out to be more like a cleaver used by butchers than a sword. Its name was Krumbui. It was one of the weapons he used when he joined the rebellion to free the people of the continent suffering under the tyranny of the Holy Kingdom of Rutheginea. Once he held out the blade, a strange light flowed out from it and a somewhat easy going and light hearted voice of a man could be heard.

“It’s been a while, Betrayer. Under what presumption have you drew me once again?”

Bertelgia looked around in surprise, but there was only Sungchul and her in sight. The one who had spoken was his blade. Krumbui was a sentient sword, an Ego Sword.

“I no longer work for you.”

Frost seemed to accumulate onto the sharp edge of the blade until it became dull like an old kitchen knife.

“Woah! What is that?”

Bertelgia spoke in surprise. Krumbui immediately retorted.

“Then what are you? You’re also a talking book yourself.”

Sungchul grabbed Bertelgia who was wanting to respond and pocketed her before returning his gaze to the large sword in his hand and then spoke calmly.

“You will have to work with me for the moment.”

“The reason being?”

“To save innocent people.”

Sungchul looked toward the turbulent waves and the thousands of homes floating on top of those waters.

“Is this Panchuria? It’s been a while,” said the blade.

“The city will soon be destroyed. If we do not sever the chain that holds the city, the water will swallow countless people to their death.”

“Your clumsy sense of justice is the same I see.”

Krumbui spoke sarcastically but unlike his sarcasm, the sword's edge regained its sharpness.

“It's just this one time.”

“I don't need you for much anyways.”

Sungchul suddenly leaped onto a houseboat with Krumbui in one hand.

‘Boom!’

It was quite a large house, but the impact of the landing caused it to swoon and shake. Once Sungchul landed onto the roof, he sprinted across the rooves navigating his way to reach the large chains that held the city center.

“L-look over there! What is that?”

Guards on patrol aboard a mid-sized vessel were dumbfounded upon discovering Sungchul.

“That's an amazing speed. Just who is that man?”

“Could that be one of the rumored Seven Heroes?”

As the soldiers were trying to piece together Sungchul's identity in a befuddled manner, one of the veteran soldiers who had a lot of experience managed to remember the weapon in Sungchul's hand and urgently shouted back.

“Idiots! That's the Enemy of the World!”

“What? Doesn't the Enemy of the World wield a hammer?”

“You narrow-minded idiot! That's Krumbui. It's the weapon he used before he stole Fal Garaz from the Dwarf Kingdom!”

The guards shot up in surprise to sound the alarm. The city that

had been steeped in a drowsy afternoon went into high alert. Bells of every kind were rung and every tool was employed to make dissonant noises in alert of the Enemy of the World's arrival. Even the hopeless drunks were brought out of their stupor and forced to head outside for once by this unprecedented event.

Sungchul witnessed chaos spreading through the city like wildfire as he continued to run across the rooves toward the city center as he planned. Following the chains and ropes which crisscrossed the entirety of Panchuria, Sungchul arrived at the center where the residence of Governor Chui was. This houseboat was made from a massive five-story warship, a landmark readily visible from the whole city due to the relatively low height of average houseboats.

Sungchul safely landed upon the Governor's home uninterrupted. The soldiers guarding the Governor did not dare to move out of sheer terror and the thought of fighting did not occur to them. A skinny officer kicked at the soldiers' rears and shouted a command.

"What are you all gawking at! Fire, you useless maggots!"

Sungchul stared at the officer with piercing eyes of indifference. The officer that met his gaze froze like a deer caught in the headlights before turning to flee. Sungchul swung the massive Krumbui lightly.

Whoosh

The overwhelming gust of wind swept through the soldiers causing their clothes and hair to shake violently. Several of their hats could not endure the wind and fell into the river water. Sungchul then glared at them and uttered a single word

"Scram."

The Panchurian rabble carried out his order obediently. Sungchul stood before the residence that had been reduced to

pandemonium and looked to the metal chain that held Panchuria together.

“Ugh... What is that?!”

Governor Chui ran out to his terrace on the third floor of his home in a panic and discovered Sungchul.

“P-please stop this! Commander-in-chief of the Empire! Panchuria will be done if you cut that chain!”

“...”

Sungchul did not spare the Governor even a single glance before lifting Krumbui and slicing the chain through.

Crunch!

It was a metal chain the size of a large tree trunk, but when met with the sharp blade of Krumbui and Sungchul’s god-like strength, it split like butter. The innumerable floating homes that were held together by the chain trembled as though they were met with an earthquake.

“Uwaaa! Panchuria is done for!”

The Governor held his head and looked toward the sky as he screamed in despair, but another quake incomparably larger than the one before struck his home the next moment. Laurumei Chui immediately fell off from his terrace headfirst.

“Arghhhhhh!”

It was enough for an average person to die or be gravely wounded, but as someone befitting the title of Governor, Laurumei stood up with light abrasions and bruises. He slowly raised his head to find something black lingering in his vision. It was not a common occurrence for something to be seen underwater where the water was always muddy and unclear.

‘A fish?’

But there was no way that there was a fish that big, and soon the

Governor saw it. The figure of a Colossus that was pushing away the river in its entirety to make its way to the surface.

*

At the same time, something was occurring at the Panchurian branch of the Coalition of Merchants.

“Kruut Asaam! What is your relation to the Enemy of the World?”

At this place, mercenaries hired by the Coalition of Merchants had tied Kruut to a pillar while shaming him under the eyes of several people. The Head of the Panchurian Branch of the Coalition of Merchant’s was watching Kruut’s interrogation with a bored expression on his face.

“That bastard Laurumei, why is he not taking the opportunity right in his face?”

He had considered taking on Sungchul, even on his own. Even if Sungchul was someone of great infamy within the world and was considered impossible to oppose, but he felt that the seasoned mercenaries he had gathered from all over at great personal cost had a chance of victory. He could only feel this way as he had never witnessed someone truly powerful. He was a Panchurian hick who had grown in Panchuria and had only seen Panchurian people.

The way he saw it, Sungchul was someone that about ten Superhuman assassins could take care of handily. Although he had no way to verify it, but he had managed to acquire fifteen Superhuman assassins from the underworld. He didn’t doubt that the Enemy of the World would show his face if he continued to hold Kruut in this way. And once Sungchul finally shows himself, the Branch Manager planned to use the Superhuman assassins to kill the man who had risen to the ranks of legends.

‘I might be able to get an important position within the main branch of the Coalition if I manage to succeed with this. No, I

might even become Governor Hornecko's successor from this!

As the branch head continued to daydream, a single boat was heading in this direction from the far side of the waterway evoking great waves.

“Is it the Enemy of the World?”

The Branch Manager lifted his body from his seat with a look filled with anticipation, but it soon turned to disappointment.

“It's Clarise Asaam. Kruut's Granddaughter.”

Someone nearby whispered into his ear.

“Grab that woman too and tie them up together.”

The Branch Manager ordered with annoyance clearly present in his voice. But in the next moment, something jumped out from behind Clarise causing a massive torrent of water to spray everywhere. The Panchurian river quaked violently causing the entire city floating on top to shake with equal force. Several thousands of houseboats shook terribly when the chains which tied the city together were severed.

“What is this?”

Unfortunately, this was not the end of it. A powerful quake, incomparably larger than the previous, shook through the entirety of the city before the previous one had even finished. The Branch Manager could see it amidst the quaking. He could see the mountainous something that was making its way out of the river through the city.

“W-what is that?!”

It was Eckheart's masterpiece. Colossal Calamity Warmachine Bertelgia Unit 3 had awakened from its long slumber of thousands of years.

“...”

Sungchul watched from afar, looking at the colossus that was

rising out of the water, as it pushed the floating homes away.

‘It’s larger than I thought.’

The large chain that held the city was cut, but the countless small chains that held the boats together still remained.

“Is my work done?”

Sungchul shook his head at Krumbui’s question before flying like a streak toward the bottleneck of ropes and chains, cutting them apart with a single strike.

“Your work has just begun.”

It was more effective to cut apart the ropes and chains soaked in all kinds of debris and filth of the river water with the larger blade surface area of Krumbui compared to Fal Garaz. In other words, it was simply Krumbui’s role to cut apart the junk.

“Mm... To cut apart the disgusting filth than the lives of warriors.”

“It’s all in the name of saving lives.”

Sungchul continued to cut apart the various things that held the boats together one after another without rest. The Colossus pressed up from below the boathouses and broke them apart as it emerged from the water near the southern port of the city. Countless homes that were connected to each other through chains were wound up together before sliding off the moss-covered surface of the giant and plunging into the water. Innumerable people died violent deaths in confusion as the city was wrapped in chaos that couldn’t be compared to the moment when Sungchul made his appearance.

“Ugh... S-Stop that thing!”

The Branch Manager commanded his hard acquired assassins, but there was no way his assassins would follow such orders in such a situation.

“How the fuck do we stop that kind of a thing, idiot?”

The assassins hopped onto a small boat and rowed the oars frantically. The Branch Manager witnessed Clarise pull apart the ropes which bound Kruut with her bare hands before putting him aboard the Branch Manager’s own boat.

“Stop that thing! Stop it, I say!”

There was now no one left beside the Branch Manager. Clarise peeked over toward him before rowing with great speed to escape this place. The Branch Manager, now left alone, could feel everything turning dark around him. He felt a chill crawling up the back of his neck and turned back to see a massive figure that seemed to reach the top of the heavens and a tsunami of homes and boats showering in a flurry heading in his direction.

“Aaahhhhhh!”

The black torrent swallowed up the Branch Manager while Sungchul kept cutting apart the chains that held the boats together.

“Everyone, ignore everything and escape to the water! Hurry!”

Bertelgia clung onto Sungchul’s back and warned anyone she saw to run for safety. Sungchul’s determined struggle didn’t turn out to be useless after all. The floating homes that were struck by the immense tsunami and scattered with the arrival of the Colossus in the center and northern port of the city had enough pliability to float on the water, but the areas that he hadn’t managed to cut apart crashed into one another from the rolling waves, submerging into the water in pieces.

The rough turbulence caused the lanterns lighting the buildings to shatter and ignite into a powerful blaze that swept across the western side of the city. The blaze continued to grow as time passed and looked as if it was about to swallow up the entire river. Sungchul looked up toward the Colossus who stood on top of the

blazing waters in its entirety. A thunderous voice rang out from the top of the Colossus.

“Demolisher! I have seen your might, but how about now? Can you face this Colossus made to take after a god?”

Daltanius let out a haughty laugh.

“Your role has come to an end.”

Sungchul placed Krumbui into his Soul Storage and pulled out Fal Garaz instead. He looked up toward the Colossus and recited his mantra in a low tone of voice.

“There’s nothing I can’t handle.”

Chapter 131 – Colossus (2)

He hadn't dealt with quite a massive opponent before. Sungchul inwardly felt admiration toward the man that had created the colossus.

'Eckheart. I thought he wasn't normal, but to make something like this.'

This was the moment when Sungchul's interest in the Creationist class that Eckheart had mastered reached the highest it had ever been.

"Die, Enemy of the World!"

The colossus's hand slowly extended toward the sky. An enormous amount of water cascaded and rained down like waterfall as the colossus's arm covered the sun, appearing as if it reached the very tip of the heavens. The survivors of Panchuria could not believe the sight that was unfolding before their eyes and reacted to it in varied manners.

Many muttered prayers of penitence toward their god while others stared at the figure of the colossus unblinkingly as though they were mesmerized. Outcries of screams and laments echoed throughout the crowd like a scattering of rice husks as the arm of the colossus fell toward the ground. The scene held an unprecedented force and terror that would force even the bravest of people to clench their eyes shut. There was only one that could keep his eyes on the giant's blow.

"..."

Sungchul watched the colossus's attack that looked as though it would collapse the world itself and moved to the side. He used the wreckage of Panchuria, from the sinking homes and the still intact boats as footholds to evade the trajectory of the giant's arm that was falling from the sky.

It was more of a great escape than an evasion. Only after he had ran across half the river did he enter the safezone where he stopped to watch the gigantic arm fall and destroy the city he had been staying at without so much as batting an eye. A third of the northern part of the city which had been relatively intact until now was destroyed in an instant by a single strike. Not only that, the aftershock that followed created a second impact sweeping up everything nearby in destructive debris. Sungchul welcomed this impact with his body.

“...”

A faint smile formed on his lips as he felt this exhilarating impact that he hadn't experienced in quite a long time.

“Are you ok?”

Bertelgia who sensed the impact from the safety of her pocket asked carefully. Sungchul replied calmly.

“The man you call father. He had the same thought that I did.”

When others were advocating and pursuing a well-balanced growth, trying out and dabbling in a variety of things that no one could agree on, Sungchul carried on silently and steadily in only improving his Strength.

Against the so-called balanced growthers, having a moderate Strength meant that his weakness could be exploited. But if Strength was to surpass the limit of what is commonly believed to be possible then Sungchul believed that he could overcome any and all opposition no matter how powerful the adversary.

Eckheart's colossus was very similar to Sungchul's line of thinking. because if not, then there was no reason to make anything so ridiculously large.

‘Should we go?’

Sungchul made a beeline toward the giant's arm that was now submerged in the river after landing a blow on the city. When he

used the god-like power of his legs to initiate a dash, his figure vanished for a moment before reappearing on top of the colossus's arm.

Sungchul lifted Fal Garaz and brought it down on the giant's arm hard.

Boom!

A colossal noise reminiscent of thunder burst out as the immense figure of the colossus trembled for a moment. It was as though an ant... no, a tiny human that could be considered a speck caused this towering figure comparable to a mountain to shake with a single blow. The rocks that wrapped around the colossus's arms crumbled away like crackers and fell into the muddy water as countless fragments, but that was it. A portion of the arm had broken off, but other than that, not much else was affected.

'As I expected, it ignores most forms of impact due to its incredible size and weight. It is an amazing idea.'

Sungchul looked toward the flashing eyes of the colossus that was covered in thick fog where Daltanius would be sitting. There had to be a core that powered the colossus in some place. It could be possible to break it if he continued to pound the giant as he was doing now, but he wanted to end this battle as quickly as possible. He left the large crater-like hole in the ground to climb the colossus's arm and headed upwards. His objective was the colossus's head.

Unfortunately, he was met with a small problem. The arm had less traction than he expected. The surface had been worn down and covered with moss while it was submerged in the river for thousands of years making its surface quite slippery. To make things worse, Daltanius noticed Sungchul climbing up the arm and made him slip by raising the incline of the arm.

"Not a chance!"

“...”

Daltanius lightly shook the arm in the end to truly put an end to Sungchul's attempts. Sunchul hopped off in mid-climb.

“Serves you right!”

Daltanius burst into a haughty laughter as he made the colossus take a step back and raise its other arm high into the air.

“Careful!”

Bertelgia let out a sharp shout to which Sungchul nodded in acknowledgment before looking around his surroundings. His eyes caught sight of the metallic chains poking through whatever remained of the crumbled floating homes after the impact.

Sungchul dashed to those chains and pulled them hard. The dozens of meter long metal chains appeared above water, clinking. The metallic chains had stakes attached at regular intervals which had been used to anchor the boathouses. As soon as Sungchul noticed those, he unhesitatingly swung the chains towards the body of the colossus like a whip.

Boom!

The metal stakes attached to the chain was hammered into the colossus's body.

‘It's a bit lacking.’

Sungchul took off toward the other debris, but then the colossus's arm came falling down upon him diagonally. He would be able to evade if he put all of his efforts into making his way forward, but there were not many places to step there and the flames were dancing wildly everywhere. By the thick stench of gasoline, the flames on the water didn't seem it would be extinguished any time soon.

Sungchul briefly contemplated his next actions. Countless previous experiences repeatedly flashed across his mind when

some dark object visible just under the muddy surface of the river happened to catch his eye. Inspiration struck him.

‘I can use this.’

Sungchul dredged up the dark object. It was the massive chain that had once held Panchuria together before he had cut it into two. It would have normally sunk to the bottom under its own weight, but it had been kept afloat by all the debris of the city and remained within arm’s reach of the surface.

“Uwaa! I’m dying!”

At the moment Bertelgia’s cry rang out, Sungchul gripped the chain with one hand and swung Fal Garaz toward the colossus’s arm.

Boom!

Unbelievable force and shockwave struck the sinking city once again. Several sprouts of water formed as the smashed remains began to sink. People who fled toward the riverside watched with their mouths hanging open, the legendary battle that would be immortalized and retold for all of time.

“Was the Enemy of the World done in?”

“Even if he is the Enemy of the World, it can’t be easy to survive a few hits from that thing.”

“Just what is that gigantic monster? Is it a Calamity from god?”

Among the diverse speculations, a keen-eyed young man pointed toward the colossus.

“He’s alive! The Enemy of the World is alive!”

At his words, the onlookers forgot even the misfortune which befell them and came crowding around the edge of the river to point with their fingers. At the end of their fingertips was the silhouette of a man. The onlookers exclaimed at the sight. A finger of the colossus had been destroyed and was sinking into the river.

And close by on a roof of a boathouse stood a man who had chains wrapped around his body.

“...”

Sungchul let loose the chain wrapped around him and let the god-like strength flow throughout his body.

He pulled the massive chain taut

‘Ki-ki-kiriit’

and his muscles clenched.

The boathouse that Sungchul had been standing on broke apart and sank underwater. Sungchul climbed onto the neighboring massive home that was once used as the governor’s mansion and yanked at the chain once again. When he did so, the iron pillars on the other side of the river which securely anchored the metal chains got pulled out in a sequence like turnips.

Daltanius couldn’t help but shout from the cockpit in disbelief at the scene unfolding before his eyes.

“Just how crazy is this bastard? What’s his Strength value?”

The man had now twice done something that Daltanius, a man renowned for his strength, couldn’t dare even attempt, but this wasn’t a situation where one could stay frozen in shock. Sungchul was continuing to attack relentlessly after all.

The massive chain that once held the city began to lash out like a whip toward the giant.

Slam!

This chain that extended hundreds of meters long made a strong impact on the colossus’s shoulder. The colossus did not get damaged, but the stake at the end of the chains remained lodged on its shoulder where it was hit. Sungchul tugged the chain a single time to confirm the fixture before charging toward the colossus. The surface of the giant was still extremely slippery, but the chain

that Sungchul managed to impale the second time around was enough to act as a ladder. Sungchul glided across the chain like a streak to climb onto the body until he reached its shoulder.

The colossus had no way to respond as it was created to display massive destructive force through its size in exchange for more intricate functions. Sungchul climbed onto the defenseless shoulder and stared at the giant's head. Daltanius was inside.

“Fine. As it has come to this, let us fight fair and square!”

Daltanius jumped out of the cockpit. Although he was just a human who didn't look all that impressive compared to the colossus, his build which was visible as he stood atop the colossus's head was a sight to behold. It was a confident and bold figure befitting the name of the Seven Heroes. He gripped his fist and reassumed his stance again.

“How about we settle this with our fists like men?”

Sungchul placed Fal Garaz into his Soul Storage. A smug smile formed on Daltanius' lips.

“It's a challenge!”

Daltanius leaped forward like an arrow and swung his fist at Sungchul. It was a powerful blow carrying a gust of wind the strength of which was comparable to that of cannon fire, but Sungchul's hand grabbed his collar before he could land his punch. Daltanius had a realization at this point.

‘This bastard's Dexterity is no joke either’

Sungchul spun Daltanius around a single time with his grip still firmly on Daltanius' collar and threw the man at the colossal golem's head. Daltanius let out a pitiful scream as he tore through a portion of the giant's head by the force of Sungchul's physical strength combined with the momentum of his own punch.

“Uggh...”

In any case, Daltanius' toughness had to be admired.

His Vitality must be similar to mine or slightly higher.'

Daltanius bled from his mouth as he made a meaningful smile.

"Good! Very good! Here I go again!"

Daltanius ran toward Sunghul once again, but it was the same average attack that was no different than the one before which sparked Sungchul's suspicions.

'He should know himself that an attack of this level would never work. Are the Seven Heroes only of this caliber?'

"DIE!"

Daltanius let out a shout as he threw his fist, but at that moment, something flashed from inside his mouth. Sungchul's sharp eyes did not miss it.

Hidden weapon?!'

Sungchul's suspicions became reality as the transparent glass-like hidden weapon that was concealed underneath Daltanius' tongue flew toward him.

'This is a bit dangerous.'

Sungchul threw his body toward Daltanius whose fist was closer than expected, but the steel needle narrowly managed to only pierce Sungchul's clothes as it passed by. It only grazed him, but Sungchul could guess its lethality. It must have been a legendary grade tool at the very least which were hard to come by. Daltanius' fist struck squarely onto Sungchul's face at the very next moment.

"..."

It was a heavy blow that he hadn't felt in a while, but Sungchul's neck did not budge. Instead, he took Daltanius' punch to the face and grabbed him with one hand.

'Shit!'

Daltanius's punch struck true, but his main strike was always the hidden weapon. In reality, he hadn't even put all of his strength into that punch, and because of the punch, Sungchul was able to retaliate after absorbing the impact leaving him with no way to escape.

Wham!

Sungchul grappled Daltanius and then smashed him into the golem's shoulder, embedding him into the colossus.

"Mercy!"

Daltanius hurriedly shouted, but Sungchul did not have even a single reason to show such mercy. He spat out a spit mixed with blood and coldly spoke,

"The one that boldly challenged me to a fistfight turns to the cowardly use of hidden weapons. The title of Seven Heroes is wasted on you."

"In truth, the weapon I wield best is the axe."

Daltanius brought out a mighty axe from his Soul Storage as if to prove his statement.

"Let us fight fairly..."

Unfortunately, Sungchul's fist made its way to Daltanius' face first.

Wham! Wham! Wham!

Sungchul thoroughly shattered Daltanius' face without so much as an iota of a mercy. Daltanius' large frame shook a single time before bending over backwards like a shrimp. He wasn't dead. Although he had lost consciousness, his body was recovering far too quickly to believe he was human. He must have equipped himself with a recovery based Soul Contract unlike Sajators. Since that was the case, there was no need to give him any time. Sungchul pulled out Fal Garaz for the final blow.

Blam!

The terrifying natural regeneration was useless before Fal Garaz. Daltanius of the Seven Heroes was reduced to a pile of blood that resembled nothing of his original form. Sungchul confirmed his death before retrieving the axe and looking over his weathered coat. Daltanius' spike had made an ugly hole through it. Sungchul frowned.

'I guess it's time for some needlework. Anyways, is this the second one now?'

Sungchul looked over Daltanius' corpse. It was similar to Sajators' instance. It didn't have any response. When the Demon King died, he could see the flow of Calamity, but in the case of these Seven Heroes, there was nothing.

'Is it that I have to kill every member of the Seven Heroes to see the flow of Calamity?'

It was a shame, but killing two members this quickly was encouraging. In any case, the situation hadn't completely been resolved just yet.

Boom! Boom!

The colossus was moving upstream to destroy what remained of Panchuria. It was moving North. If left to its devices, it would sweep up Panchuria and the northern territories of the Human Empire as well.

Sungchul climbed aboard the head of the colossus where Daltanius had been seated earlier. There were stairs leading down from the top of the head. When he climbed down, he found a rectangular room that was enveloped in darkness. It was the control center of colossus Bertelgia Unit 3.

Sungchul, having entered the control room, began to seek out a method to stop the giant. Unfortunately, there seemed to be no way for a layperson to do anything about the golem. It was at this

time that Bertelgia popped out of Sungchul's pocket to reveal herself.

“Hm? I feel as though I've been here before?”

Bertelgia flew up into the sky, to the center of the control room, and noticed the large book in a crevice that appeared to be radiating a soft light. It was when she noticed this that she called out to Sungchul.

“Mm. Doesn't that look really similar to me for some reason?”

Chapter 132 – Colossus (3)

“Now that I look at it, it looks similar.”

Its material and size were quite similar. Even the leather used to make the binding was almost identical to Bertelgia’s.

“How about we first pull the book? It looks like it acts as the key to moving the Colossus.”

“Alright.”

Sungchul extended his hand toward the book veiled in a blue light, but as his hand was about to touch its surface, an invisible barrier appeared to stop his approach and at the same time glowing words appeared before him.

[Those without authority may not remove the Key of Knowledge.]

[List of those with authority is as follows:]

[Seven Heroes, and the Creationist Eckheart]

As expected, Sungchul was not on the list. He attempted to pull the book out with his usual method, brute strength, but when he put in a bit more effort, the immaterial seal broke apart. A different set of words appeared before Sungchul’s eyes.

[A word of warning. Pulling the Key of Knowledge without authority will cause the Colossus to go on a violent rampage.]

Sungchul promptly clenched his fists after seeing those words.

‘This is a problem.’

Fortunately, the string of text wasn’t quite over yet. Sungchul continued to read the new text carefully.

[If you are a person of future generations and only if there is a reason for the Colossus to stop, answer the following question.]

[Are you an Alchemist?]

Sungchul nodded, and when he did, the lamps of luminous ore emerged from the many hidden gaps and illuminated the control room which had been shrouded in darkness. At the same time, ancient pieces which had been scattered all over the room moved on their own accord to form one large table.

[Prove yourself.]

The moment those words appeared before him, a box made of ice descended from the ceiling and was laid on the table. The ice disappeared leaving behind some misty gas instead of water, and in its place, there remained various reagents and different types of minerals, plants, and insects contained in glass bottles.

[Eckheart's Third and Final Problem.*]

[There will be an Alchemic Item craftable from the Alchemic materials below. Make said item and place it upon the altar, then the Colossus will cease its movement.]

[Additionally, it matters not which tools you use.]

It was a trial befitting of Eckheart. Sungchul looked toward the table full of Alchemic reagents. There were much that was familiar to him, but there were also other ores, samples, and specimens that were new to him. What was Eckheart asking to be made from all this? This question weighed on Sungchul's mind. There were more than sixty types of materials on the table, and they were all ingredients with strong individual characteristics that made it difficult to intuitively guess how they interacted with each other.

‘This is a nearly impossible order.’

It would be difficult to rely on luck, and there were only one of each ingredient in each bottle. This was a test that would not even permit failure while the Colossus continued to move at this very moment. There was an Observation Orb at the front of the cockpit that would allow one to see the outside through the golem's eyes. The Colossus was going up the river stream to destroy Panchuria at

the moment.

‘This is outside my abilities.’

He was the type to avoid lingering on the impossible. He looked directly at Bertelgia.

“Bertelgia.”

Bertelgia was already on the table looking over the materials. As she wasn't flapping about and simply looking over them like an inanimate object, she must have been locked deep in thought. Sungchul believed in her and waited for her response.

One minute, another minute, and another...

“Ah!.”

Bertelgia opened her mouth breaking her silence. Sungchul looked toward her expectantly.

“I fell asleep.”

“...”

“Just kidding! It's a joke. Don't look at me with such a scary expression. I am seriously trying to figure it out!”

She fell into thought again. However, it looked like the materials laid on the table were more difficult to solve than expected, even for her.

“Hm. Wait a minute. There are a few useless ones mixed in here.”

Bertelgia moved and pushed aside the third reagent on the first row.

“Aren't you supposed to use it all?” Sungchul asked quizzically.

“I thought that at first too, but now that I look at it, I don't think that's the case.”

Bertelgia grabbed onto another ingredient three spaces over and bit it to pull that aside as well.

“Don’t just sit there and gawk. Help me out!”

“...”

Sungchul did as she asked and pulled out every third ingredient to the side, and once all the organization was complete, she flapped around above the table to look down on all of the materials left.

“Hm...”

There was no progress at first, but by the time it would have taken to drink a single cup of tea...

“Ah!”

Sungchul looked over at her again with less expectations than before.

“I think I see the gist of it!”

She spoke with excitement laced in her voice.

“What do you see?”

When Sungchul asked, her body suddenly began to radiate some rosy light. It was an unusually auspicious light.

“Look. Look! The seal of a page not within the index is being undone!”

Her pages began to slowly open up within this radiant light until a single page revealed itself before Sungchul. It was just another recipe page like any other he had seen, but it wasn’t the average recipe.

[Mage’s Stone]

Level: 7

Attribute: –

Ingredient: Feather of a Thousand Year Bird, Sap of the Golden Tree, Powder of a Comet, nearly perfect Gold, Cast Skin of a Burrowing Insect ...

Sungchul doubted his own eyes.

‘A level 7 Alchemic Item?’

He had never made a 6th level Alchemic Item, but to suddenly make a 7th level Alchemic Item...

“Just what is this?” Sungchul stared at the recipe while speaking.

“As you can see, it’s a 7th level Alchemic Item. It’s also non-attributed. I was surprised that I had such a thing inside me as well.

“It wasn’t an indexed page?”

“That’s right. It must have been sealed for certain reasons. For a human, it would be similar to that feeling, you know, when there is something on the tip of your tongue but you somehow can’t quite grasp it.”

“Hm.”

Sungchul stroked his chin while looking at the huge array of ingredients. It was difficult to grasp where to even begin.

“First off, we shouldn’t shrink away and instead, start making it together.”

Bertelgia spoke encouragingly before flying above the table. She grabbed a few of the materials with her pages and arranged them before Sungchul.

“Now that we have the recipe, there’s nothing to fear, right?”

“That could be so.”

Sungchul grabbed the materials she presented and began to delicately and carefully prepare them as he always did. While he prepared the ingredients, Sungchul discovered that the materials had already been passed through the hands of an impressive Alchemist.

‘This... They have already been prepared to perfection.’

They appeared to be strewn about without thought, but each of the ingredients were preserved to display their natural efficacy perfectly by the hands of some master. Sungchul looked through each of the ingredients and could not stop marveling at each of them. He had never seen Eckheart in person, but he would not have withheld his praise toward this great Alchemist had Eckheart been standing before him.

“Bertelgia, it looks like there is no need to prepare the materials,” said Sungchul.

“Hm? Is that right? Should we start making it then?”

Sungchul pulled out Eckheart’s Portable Cauldron and looked around the table to find a spot to place his alchemic cauldron on. Surprisingly, the spot he found appeared to fit Eckheart’s cauldron perfectly. Sungchul felt a strange pleasure from this discovery as he began his alchemy with the materials provided.

The perfectly prepared best possible ingredients were readily turned into the highest quality alchemical items at Sungchul’s mere touch. And the Alchemical Items that he had crafted to be used as components were of S+ quality; a level Sungchul had never attained before. Sungchul could sense Eckheart’s kind consideration throughout the process.

‘This trial is designed to be passable as long as one knows the recipe.’

The materials were prepared in a way that even the most inexperienced beginner could synthesize. The arrangement of the carefully scrutinized and stable assortment were meant to minimize the chance of failure. Sungchul realized the amount of effort and care that went into preparing the ingredients for this trial each time he made another alchemic item.

In this way, Sungchul finished synthesizing every item and was left with the final step of synthesizing the Mage’s Stone.

“Good good. Let’s continue like this all the way!”

Sungchul peered over at Bertelgia who was suddenly cheering him on from the side. A single thought popped into his mind.

‘Could it be that this test could only be solved with the prerequisite that this brat was here?’

There was no way for even the most experienced of Alchemists to be able to resolve this test with the oppressive condition of being able to use the vast array of ingredients with only one attempt after a single glance.

‘If that’s so...’

Sungchul began to faintly see his effort taking shape, and he started to synthesize the final form of the Alchemic Items: the Mage’s Stone. As each of the final ingredients were prepared and placed into the Cauldron, the faint light within the Cauldron grew brighter as Sungchul continued to diligently mix the items.

He could feel quite a bit of mana leave his body with each swirl as expected of the mana consumption of a level 7 Alchemic Item. The Sungchul of the past might have had to take time to coordinate his synthesizing and his rest breaks, but the current Sungchul had reached a stunning 600 Magic Power which was an impressive level even for a Mage’s standards.

Sungchul continued to stir the cauldron without rest and waited for the process to finish. How much time had passed? The faint light within the cauldron grew blindingly bright as it poured out of the cauldron like a fountain. His mana was about to hit its rock bottom. From the radiance, Sungchul could feel his heart beating in a way it hadn’t before as he waited for the texts that he knew would appear soon. The results soon arrived.

[Alchemy Success!]

A fairly clear shape of a smile appeared on Sungchul’s lips.

“Uwa! We did it! We really did it!”

Bertelgia flew about excitedly while a single stone floated out of the cauldron with a clear outline. It was about the size of a child's head. The surface was covered with strange shapes and indecipherable words that glowed with the blue light. Sungchul took the stone in his hands.

< Mage's Stone >

Level: 7

Grade: S

Attribute: –

Type: Relic

Effect: Collect the other 5 stones. Once you do, the Path of Truth will open before you.

“ ... ”

Sungchul then brought the stone to the altar. When the Mage's Stone was placed, the luminescent ores within the control room flicked in unison. Every slight rumbling within the room stopped as a thick stillness replaced it. The Colossus that had been destroying Panchuria finally ceased its rampage. Sentences popped up for Sungchul who had been silent.

[Impressive. You have completed the Mage's Stone.]

[You have my blessings, if my daughter is with you, but admirations and curses, if she is not.]

The book at the center of the control room lost its light. Bertelgia was the first one to discover this and said as such.

“That book over there. I think it lost its seal?”

Bertelgia rammed the book even before Sungchul's hand reached over to pull it out.

“Aight!”

Astonishingly, the book fell down beneath the altar as if it had lost its powers and became just another ordinary book. Bertelgia let out a cheer.

Sungchul casually looked over at the opening that the book had been placed into.

“Bertelgia.”

“Hm?”

“Climb into here.”

“Why?”

“I think there’s something here. Something that your father left behind.”

She would normally ignore what Sungchul had to say, but when Sungchul had mentioned her father, she obediently flew over to the opening and closed her covers in order to push herself inside.

There was no response at first, but Bertelgia’s entire body began to become enveloped in bluish light.

“Ah.”

“Are you ok?” Sungchul hurriedly asked.

“Yea, I’m ok. It just feels really warm here. And... wait a minute.”

She grew silent once again. Sungchul could only watch her patiently.

“I think I know it now. Everything regarding this golem. I don’t know how, but I think I can give commands to this golem!”

Chapter 133 – Colossus (4)

“Is that right?”

“Yep!”

Bertelgia’s voice was filled with confidence.

“Huhu! I feel like I became Super Bertelgia? I feel like I can become stronger than you with just a bit of adjustment!”

“...”

That excessive overconfidence bothered Sungchul.

“Then lift your right arm.”

He occasionally liked to tease.

“Wait a bit.”

The ground shook slightly. Sungchul looked toward the crystal and noticed that the colossus’s left arm had been lifted. He didn’t say anything as he watched Bertelgia realize her own mistake right away.

“Oops.”

The giant’s left arm came down and the right one came up.

“It’s been so long since I moved my arms that I confused my left from my right is all!”

Whatever the reason was, it turned out that Bertelgia truly could operate this colossus.

“...”

“Now, what shall we do now, Mr. Enemy of the World?”

Bertelgia asked triumphantly. Sungchul suppressed his desire to shove her back into his pocket as he spoke.

“... then have this head toward the Great Jungle. Toward where the ancient ruins lie.”

“Won’t Tree Mother obstruct us?”

“Even the Tree Mother wouldn’t be able to stop this colossus, but it might not be so bad to use this guy as an insurance.”

Sungchul pulled out a single flute from his Soul Storage. It was the magic flute gifted to him by the Lizardman Shaman. Sungchul blew on it experimentally, and beautiful melody flowed out naturally.

“It’s quite useful.”

“This is great. Shall I head there right away?”

Bertelgia relayed her command to the colossus. It turned its massive body and following the river, it headed upstream while Sungchul bound the magic flute that played itself in between the chains with a rope. The people of Panchuria watched in disbelief as the colossus left the city.

“Could it be that the Enemy of the World got the monster to turn back?”

“It’s hard to believe, but it has to be true. I saw it with my own eyes. The Enemy of the World fought with the man that popped out of the colossus’s head.”

“I saw it too! He killed that large man that was blabbering away from inside the colossus.”

There might have been a bit of debate to be had, but everyone in Panchuria knew the truth: a crucial role played by a single man known as the Enemy of the World was what allowed them to breathe another breath and stop the calamity that had fallen upon them today. Even the Governor of Panchuria, Laurumei Chui, who was supposed to be the most conservative person here did not deny Sungchul’s role.

“Just why... just for what purpose did this man do this?”

However, not everyone was approving of Sungchul.

“It’s clear as day that he did it for his benefit. It’s not for anyone else.”

Clarise did not like the people praising the Enemy of the World. She said as such; loudly while stomping about in every direction.

“Hear me? We’re like this cause of that person. If that person didn’t appear, none of these things would’ve happened!”

Kruut had been dragged away because of the gold they had received from Sungchul, and if that was not enough, the gold in question had been completely lost in the chaos as well. In other words, Clarise’s family had become broke. She glared at the colossus disappearing into the distance as she lost her cool.

“That person ruined everything!”

“Stop this, Clarise. In any case, shouldn’t we worry about food and survival first?”

Kruut tried to appease her, but her anger didn’t seem to subside.

“What kind of hero is that? A person that only serves himself! Only the Emperor of the Human Empire is a true hero!”

All of this was witnessed by Sungchul who had been sitting on the colossus’s head.

‘They were alive, the girl and the old man.’

Although she was hopping mad and spitting profanities, but that’s what Sungchul liked about her. It meant she was still quite healthy. They say that a small number of heroes lead an era, but it’s the average commonfolk that has to endure it. Without foolish but stubbornly surviving people like them, there is no such thing as heroes or the world. It was very easy to forget this fact, but Sungchul made sure to always remember that.

“Is that lady going to be ok? She’s lost her house and her job.”

“The old man and that woman are people that can survive anywhere they are dropped.”

As if to prove Sungchul's words, Clarise who was cussing him out deliriously was already on a small boat fiercely fighting over the fish floating belly up along the river with the other folks.

'I should give some sort of compensation if I return here in the future.'

Sungchul resolved to do as such before entering the cockpit. Bertelgia who had remained in the opening in the altar popped out and flew around the cockpit.

"Looks like you don't need to stay in there?" said Sungchul.

"Yep. I left a command to keep moving without me."

"How?"

"Mmm... how do I explain this... very well."

"That's convenient."

"In any case, I have something to show you."

Bertelgia headed toward the table made of stone at the corner of the cockpit. There was nothing on the table, but when Bertelgia tapped on it a few times with the corner of her cover, the top of the table opened up to reveal a small box.

"Open it. The design of it is not suitable for me to open it."

Sungchul broke the lock attached to the box with his strength and popped the box open. There was a lengthy piece of writing written onto a piece of paper. The calligraphy was orderly and not a single character was out of place as if it was printed. Sungchul read what was written on the paper.

[Eckheart's Record 3]

[A sudden thought came to me. How far are we permitted in our means to stop the Calamity? The pitiful screams of the Lizardmen will not leave my ears. Brother Sajators keeps trying to convince me by saying that we need to become a necessary evil, but I cannot accept it. However, the news of the people of the Eastern Sea

suffering under the Calamity wiped my doubts clean for a while.]

The writings on the paper broke off here. Underneath it, there were more writings hastily scratched onto the paper that were different from the ones before. Sungchul read on.

[I negate everything I said before! The Seven Heroes have betrayed everyone! If you wish to know the motivation behind their accursed actions...]

[...]

[...]

[...]

[...]

[Regrettably, you will come to know if you find the five other Bertelgia units!]

[Also, you must feed my daughter the Mage's Stone. That's not edible?! Could that actually be true? Try and find out!]

"This... is definitely your father's writing style."

Sungchul felt Eckheart's personality from the final part more than anything.

"This matches my father's handwriting, but to hide this within a golem... what could be the reason?"

"There must have been something urgent."

He couldn't rashly form any opinions based on the information provided thus far, but Eckheart must have had a deeper level of cooperation than Sungchul had ever imagined. More than anything, the colossi that bore his daughter's name was a true testament to Eckheart's abilities as an Alchemist.

"Let's go ahead and eat the Mage's Stone first."

Sungchul held up the Mage's Stone that was glittering atop the altar.

“No.”

Bertelgia ran away in a hurry, but it wasn't so easy to escape Sungchul's pursuit. She was soon caught.

“It's no good to be picky with your food.”

“Why would you eat this kind of thing? No, rather HOW are you supposed to eat it anyway? I'm a book to begin with!”

“If you have no teeth, use your gums. If you have no gums, use your covers.”

“Stop saying such nonsense!”

When Bertelgia opened her covers to complain, Sungchul moved as fast as lightning to shove the Mage's Stone into Bertelgia.

“Uwagh?!”

She swallowed it whole. To be exact, the Mage's Stone faded away like a mirage before it could touch her body. The stone lost its form before geometric symbols and letters floated around her as though they had will of their own and absorbed into her body.

“...”

Curiosity rose in Sungchul's eyes.

‘Just how many safeguards did he place?’

Even the Imperial Seal would not be guarded this stringently. As he contemplated this, Bertelgia's body that had absorbed the stone became wrapped in brilliant light. Within that brilliant light, Sungchul peeked in with squinted eyes and saw what was underneath. Something hidden under that brilliance caught his attention. For a moment, Sungchul could not believe his own eyes.

‘A girl?’

A faint image of a girl huddled in a fetal position appeared for a brief moment within the light before disappearing altogether. Instead, the energy of the light that lingered around Bertelgia flew

toward Sungchul and entered him instead. Sungchul experienced a déjà vu. It was because the same thing had happened when he had finished the Creationist quest.

[You have created the Mage's Stone and proven your qualifications in becoming a Creationist.]

[Create the remaining 5 stones to complete the path of a Creationist. The recipes for each stone will be found in each of the other colossi.]

Reward: Magic Power +20, Intuition +20

A rather meaningless reward at this point, but the fact that the Creationist quest was still progressing in this situation was quite encouraging.

“Ooo...”

Bertelgia descended as though she was quite fatigued. Sungchul grabbed her and put her into his pocket.

“How do you feel? How does it feel to have met a vestige of your father after so long?”

“... Not that happy or sad.”

“...”

“But the Mage's Stone. It was quite tasty.”

A brief, but a soft smile rose onto Sungchul's lips at those words. Bertelgia didn't dare miss it.

‘This man... He's definitely a lot softer than when we first met. Not quite sure why though!’

*

The Human Empire's rescue fleet that was headed toward Panchuria had only managed to arrive after the situation had been resolved. Most of the people in Panchuria complained why they had arrived so late, but a portion of the residents, like Clarise,

rejoiced at their arrival.

“As expected, the only thing maintaining this world is the Human Empire!”

The one leading the Human Empire Fleet was a young man by the name of Arcubus, who had recently been appointed the position of admiral by the Emperor. He greeted the high-ranking Panchurian nobles with a benevolent expression on his face and listened carefully to the tragedy and salvation that went on on these lands. Unfortunately, his ears overheard a story that could not be overlooked.

“The one that saved Panchuria is the Enemy of the World. If not for him, Panchuria and all the way up to the southern borders of the Human Empire, would have fallen to an unprecedented state of ruin.”

Laurumei, the Panchurian Governor, spoke his thoughts without reservation, but the expression on Arcubus who had heard this changed so menacingly that it might have been another person altogether.

“So... your lordship is saying that the Enemy of the World is the savior, correct?”

He threw a question laced with malevolence. Laurumei might have been the lord of some backwater region, but he was not someone that some upstart admiral could behave as he pleased with. Although he felt offended, he was suppressed by the extraordinary malice and was unable to talk back.

“I’m just relaying what the people are saying. These are just words in the wind.”

“Ah, so these are just rumors?”

Once his discussion with the Governor ended, Arcubus met with the evacuees gathered around the riverside directly to corroborate the story. The evacuees spoke similarly to the Governor.

Arcubus returned to the airship and relayed a command to his subordinates.

“There cannot be two heroes.”

The fleet that had been floating above Panchuria lit up with countless magic formations. The people of Panchuria could not know what this meant.

*

One of the reasons that Sunchul had pulled the colossus toward the river was to avoid the eyes of others, but there was another goal as well.

“Satisfied?”

Sungchul spoke to Carbung who he had placed in his coat. Before him, a mountainous colossus was moving his two enormous arms to remove the debris around the ruins. This job that could not be completed in thousands of years by an average golem was being completed quite simply by the giant.

There were no changes visible to the eye, but Sungchul understood the fact that the carbuncle Soul Gem was now willing to work voluntarily on behalf of Sungchul. The reason why was because the creature Merkit Carbuncle that Sajators had called king carbuncle had the ability to share the mind with other beings.

Sungchul did an experiment where he tried to cast two spells at the same time. He used multiple back to back Glares while the carbuncle cast meteor and in the midst of Sungchul firing multiple rounds of Glare, the carbuncle diligently finished the incantations for meteor and got prepared to be fired at any time. And by just willing the meteor to be launched, the carbuncle dropped the meteor on the jungle that Sungchul had no part in the preparation of.

The Soul Gem that had been rejecting Sungchul finally relented.

‘This is quite useful.’

Multicasting. The secret technique that Sajators had boasted about was finally in Sungchul's grasp. Unfortunately, it was not all good news. The six Soul Gems that Sungchul had take from Sajators were all rejecting Sungchul's advancement. He could feel their will in that they would not lend their strength to someone who had killed their long time master.

‘Should I just toss these?... No, I should keep them for now.’

These were hard-to-obtain Merkit Carbuncle Soul Gems. It was uncertain whether these Soul Gems would also change their minds toward Sungchul as human opinions did about such things.

Now that Sungchul managed to get a hold of Multicasting and also kill two of the Seven Heroes in the process, there was nothing more for him to do here. Sungchul left the jungle and headed toward Panchuria, but all that awaited him was death and despair. Countless corpses were splayed about along the riverside. Stench of rotting flesh lingered in the air and clouds of flies swarmed about the surroundings.

[Enemy of the World passed by.]

Unprecedented rage passed by Sungchul's eyes. He managed to get a complete story from the few survivors he found after tireless searching. And during these short conversations, Bertelgia could see Sungchul's face become as desolate as a desert like when they had first met. By the time the stories ended, Sungchul turned to Bertelgia with a tired voice.

“Bertelgia.”

“Y-yes?”

“Is this world worth saving?”

“T-that's...”

It was at this moment, the sound of something breaking could be heard from a fallen residence in the distance, and a single person sprang out from the ruin.

“Ugh! Such rotten luck! Really!”

It was far in the distance, but Bertelgia could recognize this figure.

‘Isn’t she the lady that sang really well?’

Clarise pulled out Kruut who had been curled up under the ruin.

“Hurry up and move, gramps! How long are you going to keep dozing around for? We don’t know when those sons of bitches are going to come back.”

She, who was now covered in ash and dust, was tenaciously supporting her grandfather as they walked toward a place far away from the river with determination.

“The world isn’t full with nothing but bad people, you know?”

“You might be right.”

Sungchul who replied without any confidence headed North. His destination was the Tower of Recluse. Darkness eventually descended upon the scorched earth that now laid behind his back.

Chapter 134 – Tower of Recluse (1)

The six colossi who have awoken from their millennium long slumber drove the world into extreme chaos. Countless cities were brought to complete ruin and the capitals of kingdoms collapsed and disappeared without any trace. There weren't that many that were killed directly by the colossi, but the people had lost their way of life. The citizens who lost their homes wandered the wastelands, and the kings and their lords became powerless without their castle.

Even as the situation continued to deteriorate in this way, those in power within the Continent were still unable to put forth any solutions. They were too occupied preventing the colossi from invading their own regions.

The mass destruction caused by the colossi was still in progress, and within some dark place, the ones that had awoken the giants gathered.

“Daltanius and Sajators fell to the Destroyer.”

The Seven Heroes. These people who were once saviors became Calamity itself. They each showed different reactions to the death of their comrades.

“There's nothing to be said for Daltanius, but it's kind of a waste that we lost Sajators.”

“Two of us, the Seven Heroes, faced him at the same time and lost? Hard to believe.”

“Kekeke... Sajators. He was the weakest among us.”

“Isn't the weakest you, Ga Xi Ong?”

“Ugh...!”

“Sajators couldn't fight properly. He hid like a coward and died without even being able to properly retaliate.”

Meaningless opinions continued for a while before it stopped completely. It was because a single person stepped into the dark room in which the members were residing. This man carrying two swords of different lengths across his back looked at everyone before he sat at the seat of honor at the round table.

Leader of the Seven Heroes, Desfort. This unparalleled Magic Swordsman who was known to have reached the peak of both magic and swordsmanship rested his chin on his hands and looked toward his companions.

“You don’t need to be concerned with the failings of Sajators and Daltanius. It is only that our shares have grown since they have disappeared.”

“...”

These were people of strong character, but before Desfort, none dared to speak.

“Eckheart’s junk are performing their tasks. It means that we need to slowly get involved for real.”

“What do you want to do with him then?”

One man opened his mouth in a tone that was near mechanical carrying not a hint of emotion. It was the man who hadn’t said a word while the others discussed. He was White Shadow, the Assassin with a clean record.

“We ignore him. He’ll come seek us first in any case.”

“But, what happens if he kills you first? Isn’t everything for naught in that case?”

“What do you wish to say, White Shadow?”

Murderous intent manifested within the the darkness of Desfort’s eyes.

“I will eliminate the man.”

White Shadow spoke in a dry voice that didn’t falter in the

slightest.

“... Can you do it?”

“I am an assassin.”

Immeasurable pride was infused in his brief sentence. Desfort lifted his head from his hand and fixed his posture.

“I won’t stop you if that’s what you wish to do.”

As Desfort spoke his permission, White Shadow disappeared from the round table without a trace. Curiosity rose in the eyes of his companions.

“That guy... he seems quite excited.”

“But, what do we do if even that guy falls?”

“He’s no use in a group situation anyways. It’ll be great if he gets lucky and manages to kill the Destroyer.”

As the gossiping continued, a single man placed his hand where White Shadow had sat at and grinned.

“That bastard, he hasn’t changed one bit.”

From where White Shadow had disappeared, there wasn’t even a trace of his warmth left.

*

He had seen countless carts, but it was the first time seeing a cart pulled by a gryphon. Sungchul rode on a cart lain with comfortable straws with Bertelgia and enjoyed a leisurely trip for a change. The middle aged monk driving the cart had allowed Sungchul to hitch a ride without much fuss, but it was a trap.

“Giving a ride to a passenger after so long reminds me of old times. My friend and I traveled from battlefields to battlefields for decades, participating in unbelievable battles. If my friend here didn’t hurt his wings, we would have still been in the service. Hell, If Baron or I were still in our prime, then we would have put our

abilities to use on the frontlines of the Demon Realm without any regrets.”

The monk was excessively chatty. Not only that, he only boasted about himself. As stories that he absolutely had no wish to hear continued on for 30 minutes, Sungchul began to feel exhausted.

“... Stop the cart please.”

Tsk Tsk. Such a young man has no patience.”

As though the driver was aware of his own faults, he held himself back a bit from then on. The cart pulling gryphon was given the name of ‘Baron’, and although it was now reduced to pulling carts it had a solemn grace and dignity in how it carried itself unlike its owner. As a gryphon with an exceptionally well-trained intellect, it maneuvered through the difficult mountain terrain without any particular input from the driver.

Bertelgia must have been quite fascinated by Baron as she popped out of Sungchul’s pocket while the cart stopped for a break and approached the beast.

“Hey, cutie.”

When Bertelgia approached it playfully, Baron simply rolled its eyes and watched her from the corner of its eye without any other particular reactions. Sungchul approached Baron as well. He looked over Baron a single time before speaking in a low voice.

“Your wing is seriously damaged. The bones of the wing are shattered, and to make things difficult, they were fitted wrong; causing it to heal misaligned.”

He consoled the retired gryphon while brushing its wings with adept hands.

“It looks like you’re familiar with gryphons?” asked Bertelgia.

Sungchul nodded. Memories of past politics faintly slipped by his indifferent eyes.

“Even though I’m walking on my own two feet now, I was always riding something or another in the past: airship, horse, cliff raptor, gryphon, etc. I recall that I rode on gryphons the most in those times.”

“Have you rode on wyverns as well?”

“Not just anyone can ride wyverns. If you don’t imprint one at the moment it hatches from the egg, it will never follow you.”

As they were talking, the driver who was answering the call from nature returned while pulling up the waist of his pants.

“Have you all eaten?”

He was subtly walking toward another direction. Baron lightly brushed the ground with his large claws causing the driver to walk correctly in this direction. Sungchul finally caught on that the driver’s eyes were not normal.

The driver pulled out a dark and hard bread from the sack in his cart and shared it with Sungchul. It was with the hand that he had just finished his business with as well.

“...”

Sungchul received the bread and stared at it for a while. It seemed more like a brick rather than an edible bread.

“What’s wrong? Does it not suit your tastes?”

“Is there nothing else besides this?”

“Young people should eat whatever is given. It’s not good to be picky about food. This is the only thing that can be eaten right away. I have some ingredients in that other sack, but I hate cooking.”

“I’m a bit confident in my cooking.”

Sungchul flashed the brooch that was hidden underneath his coat before standing up without delay to check the ingredients buried under the straws. Potatoes, onions, a putrid smelling butter, and

dried meat was all there was. It was enough to make a simple meal with what was provided, but it didn't satisfy Sungchul.

"Please wait a bit." He asked to be excused as he left to take a look around the vicinity.

Sungchul soon caught a rabbit. He twisted its body with an experienced hand, and began to cook it after removing its viscera. He had made a Rabbit Stew with the rabbit meat and the ingredients provided.

The driver was wary at first, but once he took a whiff of the aroma, his eyes grew wide as he stared at Sungchul.

"What? This flavor! It's just like back home...!!"

"Is there perhaps a High Class Chef back home?"

"There is one person who was particularly good at cooking. His skill was so good that people traveled from afar to eat."

"So, this person was a High Class Chef?"

"I don't know that much, but what is this High Class Chef thing that is so important to ask about?"

"... It was a personal inquiry. In any case, where is your home?"

The trip resumed once everyone finished their meal. Sungchul watched the passing scenery and felt that the Tower of Recluse was not much further away.

'It's been a while since I was back here.'

A clear mirror-like lake was reflecting the rays of the sun to glimmer beyond the towering coniferous forest. Sungchul recalled that the tower lay beside the lake surrounded by the layers of mountains. The appearance of the lake meant that they were getting much closer to their destination.

"So, what's the reason you're visiting the Tower of Recluse?" the driver suddenly asked.

“Personal reasons. I also happen to know a person there.”

Sungchul hesitated briefly when he said the word person, as the one he was to meet was too ambiguous of a being to be called human. Half of the blood that flowed within her was that of a dragon after all.

“There’s been a huge influx of Summoned at the Tower of Recluse including mages, warriors, and slaves.”

“Oh?”

“From what I’ve heard, it seems the Holy Priest rates the knowledge of Summoned very highly. I’ve heard that the Summoning Palace intentionally pulls out the Summoned who are masters of their trade ahead of time as slaves in order to aggressively utilize their knowledge.”

“That shouldn’t be useful.”

As Sungchul said, modern techniques and knowledge had little meaning within Other World because the restriction of one of the five gods in control of the world, the God of Order, held the world like an immutable law. It wouldn’t be easy to gather the necessary materials and facilities, but even if the materials were gathered and a complex machinery was created using their knowledge, the God of Order’s restrictions would prevent the operation of the machinery. Strange malignant spirits known as Gremlins would relentlessly seek out and destroy any production of such technology not allowed by the God of Order.

“Whatever the result, it’s true that there are a lot of Summoned at the Tower of Recluse. I’ve heard from the grapevine that something interesting has been made within the tower that barely managed to avoid the restriction of the God of Order.”

“I want to see that too!”

Bertelgia suddenly opened her mouth to speak. The driver looked around from side to side for the sudden voice of a little girl as he

asked Sungchul.

“What was that voice just then?”

“I sometimes imitate voices.”

Sungchul firmly pressed down on Bertelgia with his hand before speaking in a calm voice.

“... Quite a disgusting person, aren’t you? I had an inkling when you were talking about High Class Chef or whatever, but still!”

A long period of silence followed before they arrived at the road lined with worn-out tents. There were haggard and shabby looking people watching them with hostile eyes.

“Who are those people?”

Sungchul just had to ask.

“Those are the refugees. All the people that lost their homes due to the colossus gathered here. As you know, the Tower of Recluse is within the jurisdiction of the God of Order so offending existences can’t intrude here.”

The row of tents continued on without end. Unpleasant stench also followed, and it wasn’t uncommon to see people raise their voice or their fists. Sungchul could see the shadow of Calamity within the darkness of their faces.

What awaited him at the end of the numerous tents were the gathering of airships from all over the continent. These were the people that would frequently gather to observe the changes on the Scripture of Calamity after the fall of the Demon King. They kept to their camps and did not give much attention to the surroundings.

Sungchul confirmed the fluttering flags on each of the airships: Ancient Kingdom, Coalition of Merchants, Dwarf Kingdom, military flags from the northern parts of the continent, rich countries of the east, and various other influential factions. Of

course, there was an airship from the Human Empire faction as well, but there was a familiar shape of an airship next to it. A beautiful ship with fuselage painted pure white excessively boasted a look more suitable as a piece of art than a military vehicle.

Sungchul's brow creased into a frown.

'Isn't that Aquiroa's flagship? I'm sure it was destroyed in front of the Demon King's Palace.'

It was something impossible... no, rather something that shouldn't be, but Sungchul had to ask the burning question to the driver.

"Is there perhaps news of Aquiroa being at the Tower of Recluse?"

The driver exploded into laughter as he nodded at Sungchul's question.

"How did you know? That exact person is currently visiting the Tower of Recluse just in case something unsightly occurs in order to protect this place. The village is quite festive now thanks to the visit from the reputable Second Champion of the Continent.

Sungchul briefly recalled the land of fire and ice, at the bloody scene before the Demon King's palace after listening to the old man's innocent tale. Sungchul had killed Aquiroa with his own hands before the image of the fire spewing devil that was the massive volcano. Sungchul could still freshly recall the final words that Aquiroa had left him at that moment.

"Aquiroa is not an individual but many. There will be another Aquiroa to replace me from the Floating Isle."

At the time he had thought it was just a baseless uttering of a desperate woman; a ploy to draw his interest to beg for mercy.

'I can smell it. The familiar stench of rot.'

He had come to this place to read the Scripture of Calamity, but

the moment he laid eyes on the pure white airship, a new objective was added to the list.

Important Announcement:

This chapter had an error in the raws in the God name(God of Order and the God of Mediation both were used in this chapter by the author). We discussed with the author quite a bit and found out that it is all God of Order here, we also discussed regarding names as well. This has led to delay in release. To recap readers on gods, there are 5 gods in Other World—

The God of Order who ruled over goodness and justice. The God of Chaos that sought evil and entropy. The God of Mediation that maintained the world as it was. The Ancient God which was the manifestation of the eternal flow of time. Finally, the prearranged deity that was not yet born.

If you remember, Summoning Palace is governed by God of Order. Similarly here Tower of Recluse is also governed by God of Order. We found an error due to this chapter. The Slave hunter in Summoning Palace arc who makes an oath to not reveal Sungchul's identity and later helps him get into Airfruit but dies at the hands of the Assassin family. He performs the oath under the God of Order in the translation however it is actually God of Mediation. The God of Mediation presides over vows. Correction has been made.

In the ebook, God of Order went by the name of God of Neutrality. This is being changed after our discussion with the author. God of Order will be used. We apologize to our readers.

We have made changes in the previous translation from Prologue to Chapter 55 by replacing all chapters with near ebook quality chapters. The plot and everything is the same, it is just an even better version to read now that is close to the quality in our ebook and paperback(they are one step better in comparison). This has

been done to improve the reading experience(as we are able to do even better work than what we did when we started) and to maintain a consistency in terms used in both the book and the website chapters. This brings us to the second announcement of term changes that have happened across chapters:

Sungchul's nickname Demolisher has been changed to Destroyer

The stat Resolve has been changed to Resilience

The name of the creature Balrog has been changed to Balroq. (Balrog is a LOTR universe beast and there can be issues as we might land in trouble due to it. This is why the ebook had Balroq instead of Balrog and today we have made the change site wide as well)

That's it for now. The terms haven't been completely changed across all past chapters yet(from 56+ onwards) and they are being changed currently. Thank you

Chapter 135 – Tower of Recluse (2)

It was Sungchul's broad objective to first read the Scripture of Calamity and then embark Aquiroa's ship, Procrustes. He would have to fill in the finer details of the plan as he went along, but no matter the circumstance, reading the scripture took priority. If he were to meet Aquiroa, a battle couldn't be avoided, and if the Tower of Recluse got locked down due to this, there would be nothing he as Sungchul could do about it because like the Summoning Palace, this place was under the direct protection of the gods.

"I should consider how to enter that tower first."

Sungchul glared at the picturesque gray colored tower rising up from the far end of the serene rippleless lake as he walked toward it. A wooden suspension bridge that led to the entrance of the village soon appeared, and next to it was a stable. Next to the stable, the imposing Baron was resting with its wings unfurled beside the monk's cart.

"Hey, cutie."

Bertegia greeted it first, but Baron didn't acknowledge her in any way. Sungchul read the message posted at the entrance of the bridge.

[Toporo's Village Head of compassion and affection]

Bertelgia shook her body from inside her pocket after reading the nameplate.

"It looks like there are a lot of nice people living here?"

"..."

Sungchul didn't respond. It was because it was near impossible to find a truly kind person among people who referred to themselves as kind. Sungchul knew this from his own experiences.

In fact, after having crossed the bridge, he was met with a wooden fence reinforced with rusted nails and spears that obstructed his way.

“What is your purpose here?”

A burly young man that seemed to be a militiaman appeared from behind the wooden fence.

‘Is it because of me?’

Sungchul’s question was answered by the warnings posted all across the fence.

[No Entry to Outsiders – Especially Refugees!]

[Refugees can fuck off to your own lands.]

[Final Moments of a Thief ->]

At the end of the arrow indicated on the final post was a corpse of a young man that had been beaten to death and left to rot and be eaten by swarming flies and squirming maggots.

“Are you a refugee? Hm?”

The young man with a steel helmet bared his teeth as he spoke threateningly. Sungchul’s appearance was pathetic enough in his eyes to be mistaken as a refugee.

“I’m not a refugee, though.”

As Sungchul began to contemplate on how to resolve this situation when another person popped out from behind the wooden fence. It was a short but stocky man with thick brows.

“What are you doing with a Summoned!”

The man wore an armband to distinguish himself from the others and appeared to be of high status.

“Eh? A Summoned?”

“Can’t you tell by his attire? Only Summoned would wear such camouflage pants.”

The man scolded the young man for a while before stepping up to Sungchul.

“Hm...”

His big bright eyes scanned Sungchul up and down for a while before he chose to speak again.

“Are you a Summoned?”

Sungchul nodded.

“Do you have business in the Tower of Recluse?”

When Sungchul nodded again, the man had the young man step back and let him inside the village.

“The detailed announcement is posted in the village plaza, so check there.”

Sungchul nodded once again before entering the fence. He could hear the man’s voice from his back after passing by.

“It would be best for you to avoid doing anything unnecessary. Things are already a mess as they are.”

“Anything unnecessary?”

Sungchul stopped his steps and turned around to ask.

“There are several things, but I would appreciate it if you didn’t covet other people’s properties as lives could be lost for a single apple or coin.”

The man turned his gaze toward the rotting corpse beneath the fence. It was a rough indication of the tension between the village people and the refugees.

‘There’s bound to be problems with that many refugees regardless of how generous or affectionate the village head might be.’

Sungchul entered the village keeping the man’s warning in mind.

The atmosphere of the village was hostile, and everyone that ran

into Sungchul openly displayed their wariness. Sungchul's pauper appearance didn't help any either.

Tattered coat, worn-out jeans, and well-worn military boots. Sungchul's attire was no different than the average vagrant. Bertelgia noticed this problem and warned him as such.

“How about taking this opportunity to change your clothes? There's plenty of refined and great looking clothes, or just wear full-body armor. Maybe a full body armor. Something like a full body armor!”

“I won't wear such things.”

“I understand that you have taste, but it might leave a better impression on the people here if you take the step to wear such clothes.”

“Shh.”

Sungchul began to walk faster in order to quiet Bertelgia's nagging, and once he crossed through the village, he could see the path to the Tower of Recluse. The tower itself was on an island at the center of a lake, but the way to the tower could not be seen from land. There was also no bridge, dock or ferry that was so commonly seen, but if you took a closer look, there was a path. A series of stepping stones hidden just beneath the surface of the clear mirror-like rippleless lake. The people of the tower called these stones the Miracle Bridge or the Water Strider Bridge. Sungchul headed toward the small island where the tower was located, walking atop this bridge that lied at a depth that would only wet the soles of his boots.

There were hermits donned with grey robes guarding the entrance of the tower. The tower as seen through the Eye of Truth was covered and overlapped very thickly with potent defensive barriers..

‘As expected of the Tower of Recluse, it's not to be

underestimated.'

When Sungchul approached the entrance, the hermits stepped forward and engaged him.

"What is your purpose here?"

Their voice was courteous, but their eyes that could be faintly seen beneath their hoods held deep suspicion. Sungchul was wholly aware of the messy state of affairs at the current moment and decided not to stir the pot any further. He pulled out the excuse he had prepared beforehand.

"I have come to visit Hermit Kha'nes for personal reasons."

"Lady Kha'nes?"

Surprise passed across each of the hermits' eyes.

"The lady is currently out on a mission from the Holy Hermit Porpyrius."

"Hm."

A weak groan escaped Sungchul's lips.

'Is she not back yet? That girl. It's been quite a while since we met in the Demon Realm Battlefront, but now that I think about it, she was a truant-type. Curious like a dragon as well.'

Kha'nes' absence posed a great predicament. He felt the need to change his plans and threw out another question.

"When is the lady returning?"

"We cannot be sure, but I expect that she'll only return after having wandered about to her satisfaction."

"Mm... I had business in the tower."

"We apologize, but we are in a state of emergency and cannot accept foreigners into the tower without cause. However, it looks like you're a Summoned?"

One of the hermits looked more closely at Sungchul. Sungchul

noded, allowing him to continue speaking.

“It’s not that there’s no way for a Summoned. Well, it is limited to only the most intelligent among them, but we are seeking Summoned that might bring aid to the tower.”

“How so?”

“There will be a flyer at the village noticeboard. We have no more details regarding this matter, so it will be faster to read the flyer yourself.

He managed to obtain an unexpected information. Sungchul tried to leave after showing proper formality toward the hermits, but one of them called out to him.

“If you seek to stay a bit at the village, we’ll send the lady a message upon her return. Who should we refer to you as?”

The man’s intentions were good, but it was an awkward question for Sungchul. Sungchul who did not really have a response for him almost replied instinctively.

“Pa...”

As Sungchul began to speak, Bertelgia shook her body violently. It seemed like she very much wanted to avoid what was about to happen. Thanks to her, he was able to think of something reasonable to say instead.

“Tell her that I’m the man that cooked her ramen.”

“Ramen...?”

Sungchul revealed a faint smile toward the befuddled hermits before leaving this place.

*

Toporo Village was a small but abundant village that was aesthetically pleasing. The lake provided water and fish while the cool climate was appropriate for growing fruits. More than anything, it sat next to the Tower of Recluse which protected it

from external invasions.

Sungchul followed the burbling stream that ran beside the village and looked toward the vast vineyards. The vineyard on the side of the village was safe, but the vineyard on the opposite side lay desolate as if ravaged by a herd of boars. Sungchul crossed the stepping stones again and entered deeper into the village. He passed by several houses before he managed to see the village plaza.

There were various shops set up in a rectangular shape, surrounding an intimidating bronze statue located in the center of the plaza of an unnamed hermit wearing a robe with his face veiled under the hood. There was colorful brickwork laid out at the center of the plaza as expected of a rich village to form a pattern that was pleasing to the eye on which countless people were bustling about.

A noticeboard was placed beneath the clock tower of this village plaza, and like always, there was a wanted poster posted on the most prominent spot showing a portrait of the Enemy of the World. Bertelgia who noticed this quietly spoke to Sungchul.

“Must be nice to be so popular.”

Sungchul looked at the wanted poster with indifference. It seemed to have been made a fairly long time ago as the young man depicted was in an extravagant uniform with rippling mass of muscles that looked entirely different from the current Sungchul. A note in the corner of the flyer said to show proper respects to this man even during his capture as he was once the Commander-in-Chief of the Empire.

‘Was this flyer posted 8 years ago?’

It appeared to have been made around the moment the name “Enemy of the World” started to make its rounds. Sungchul’s eyes fell away as he began to feel the futile nature of time. There were other flyers messily posted onto the board, but Sungchul soon

found the one he was looking for.

[Attention! Recruiting Summoned!]

[1. Overview – It has been concluded that technology and abstraction are very well developed in the alternate world (Earth), so there will be active research and development carried out at the Tower of Recluse to utilize them. Henceforth, Summoned with world-class academic attainment are invited to come and share their knowledge.]

[2. Qualification – Summoned with comparable academic backgrounds of Other World's master's degree or doctorate. (Caution: a field of study relating to what is referred to as Liberal Arts will not qualify)]

[3. Remuneration – 10 silver coin minimum to 1 gold coin based on contribution]

[Side note – There will be a Selection Exam so those that don't qualify, do not apply]

“Mm...”

Sungchul who saw the notice felt lost. He was not a master nor a doctorate during his time in the real world, and to make matters worse, he had taken liberal arts. Rounded up, it had been about thirty years since he had arrived at Other World. It had been a long while since his knowledge of the real world had been forgotten.

“What's wrong?”

Bertelgia bluntly asked Sungchul who was standing frozen like a statue.

“It's nothing.”

Sungchul read the notice that mentioned an entrance exam and decided to change his plans once again.

‘Let's find a way to enter first. Once we enter and read the Scripture of Calamity, we can strike Aquiroa down.’

Blitzkrieg. Sungchul decided his course of action and headed toward the entrance of the Tower of Recluse again. The hermits who had been on guard before were seen blocking the entrance once again.

“Have you seen the notice?”

Sungchul nodded, and the hermits whispered something between each other. Sungchul simply waited for them to open the door to the Tower, but something unexpected occurred.

“It looks like you haven’t read the notice properly. Today is not the day of the entrance exam.”

“What do you mean?”

“There is another notice with the date of the entrance exam.”

“...”

If what the man said was true, then it was a huge blunder. But it could not really be called a blunder because Sungchul had not seen such a notice. He had cautiously checked all the other different flyers when he read the exam notice. If there was one that was advertising the date of an exam, there was absolutely no chance that it wouldn’t be placed prominently to catch the eye. Also, wasn’t Bertelgia with him as well? Sungchul turned to ask her, but she shook her body. She hadn’t seen anything like that as well. If that was the case, then none of this made sense. Sungchul glared back toward the hermits and spoke about what he had seen.

“But, I haven’t seen anything regarding the date of an entrance exam. There was no such thing on the noticeboard.”

He protested in a respectful tone, and the hermits looked at each other. Finally, one of them broke out in laughter and apologized.

“Looks like some bastard ripped up the flyer about the exam again.”

“...”

“The competition is pretty cutthroat recently. There are so many Summoned trying to enter the Tower of Recluse. As you know, colossi are running about outside along with the Seven Heroes as well. They are all seeking a safe haven here.”

“There are no safer places than the Summoning Plaza, Dimensional Door, or the Tower of Recluse.”

They turned to speak to Sungchul after having discussed something between each other.

“Just wait at the Village for now. We will send people out again to post the date of the exam.”

The way the situation was turning out, it seemed as though things would take more time to resolve, but it wasn't all bad. If it was something unavoidable, it would be correct to take time to gather information and prepare everything in order to resolve things perfectly. Sungchul decided to take a step back and breathe as he left this place.